

# **Master Thesis in English Literature and Culture, and their Social Impact**

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**The Fairy Tale as a Fertile Soil for Silenced Voices,  
Challenges to Patriarchal Authority, and Repossession of  
Non-Normative and Distorted Identities. A case of  
Study: Frank L. Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz***

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## ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this paper is to explore how fairy tales have been a fertile ground for those voices whom the patriarchal discourses were susceptible to silence and marginalize, namely women, non-normative male individuals, and children. Literature, as a cultural artifact which is context dependent—has tended to reproduce the official ideologies that, in the case of children’s literature, have sought to socialize the little ones into the traditional principles of the prevailing society, and fairy tales have not been an exception. Some of the traditional cultural practices have proved immensely damaging to women’s empowerment and self-fulfillment, by displacing them away from the public spaces and depriving them of agency. So, although in many occasions fairy tales have served to underpin the hegemonic powers—legitimizing their practices, lying beneath the smooth surface, there have existed dissenting voices which have found a way to make themselves heard from the interstices left within the textual fabric, filling them up with symbolic significance. At the turn of the century, and, particularly since the second half of the twentieth century onwards, the fairy tale has been retold not only in a literary form, but also by means of copious enriching appropriations from diverse artistic expressions, debunking gender stereotypes, and assigning new meanings to classical folk and fairy stories and characters. Furthermore, popular culture has been engaged in a fruitful dialogue with scholarly study and, as a result, there has been a cross-fertilization of ideas and experiences that have blurred the traditional boundaries between high-brow and pop culture.

The work chosen to support these statements is *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, written by L. Frank Baum in 1900. The analysis of the book will try to uncover some hidden meanings from a perspective based on gender and women’s studies, proving how the female principle has been subjected by the male one. Moreover, traditionally, women have not recognized one another as sisters but rather as enemies, a situation that patriarchal discourses have actively fostered. Also, the study of this tale will show how some of the reappropriations of the story have been emancipatory to some identities distorted by patriarchal narrowing representations.

**Keywords:** Fairy tales, *Wizard of Oz*, children’s literature, popular culture, patriarchy, witch, gender.

## RESUMEN

El propósito principal de este estudio es el de explorar cómo los cuentos de hadas han sido un terreno fértil para aquellas voces a quienes los discursos patriarcales ha tendido a silenciar y marginalizar, es decir, las mujeres, los sujetos no normativos y los niños. La literatura, como producto cultural que depende del contexto, ha solido reproducir las ideologías oficiales que, en el caso de la literatura infantil, ha pretendido socializar a los más pequeños en los principios tradicionales de la sociedad dominante, y los cuentos de hadas no han sido una excepción. Algunas de las prácticas culturales tradicionales han demostrado ser tremendamente dañinas para el empoderamiento de la mujer y su realización personal, al alejarlas de los espacios públicos y privarlas de agencia. Por eso, aunque en muchas ocasiones los cuentos de hadas han servido para sustentar los poderes hegemónicos—legitimando sus prácticas, ocultas bajo una superficie impoluta, han existido voces discordantes que han encontrado la forma de hacerse oír desde los intersticios del tejido textual, llenándolos con significado simbólico. A finales del siglo XIX, especialmente desde mitad del siglo XX en adelante, los cuentos de hadas han sido recontados no sólo por medio de la literatura sino, también, gracias a las muchas reapropiaciones enriquecedoras desde diversas manifestaciones artísticas, desenmascarando estereotipos de género, y dotando a los cuentos clásicos, y a sus personajes, de nuevos significados. Además, la cultura popular ha entablado un fructífero diálogo con las investigaciones académicas y, como resultado, se ha producido un enriquecimiento mutuo de ideas y experiencias que han permitido difuminar las tradicionales barreras entre la cultura elitista y la popular.

La obra escogida para contrastar estas afirmaciones es *El Mago de Oz*, escrita por L. Frank Baum en 1900. El análisis el libro intentará revelar significados ocultos, desde la perspectiva de los estudios de género, demostrando cómo el principio femenino ha sido sometido por el masculino. Por otra parte, tradicionalmente, las mujeres no se han reconocido mutuamente como hermanas sino más bien como enemigas, una situación que han fomentado activamente los discursos patriarcales. También, el estudio de este cuento mostrará cómo algunas de las reapropiaciones de la historia han sido emancipadoras para algunas identidades distorsionadas por representaciones patriarcales reduccionistas.

**Palabras Clave:** Cuentos de hadas, *Mago de Oz*, literatura infantil, cultura popular, patriarcado, bruja, género.

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“If you remember the pleasure of hearing a story many times, and you will remember that while you were listening you become three people. There is an incredible fusion: you become the storyteller, the protagonist, and you remember yourself listening to the story.”

(Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*)

“One doesn’t become a witch to run around being harmful, or to run around being helpful either, a district visitor on a broomstick. It’s to escape all that - to have a life of one’s own, not an existence doled out to by others.” (Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Lolly Willowses*)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

I adore fairy tales and myths. Since I was a child, I have felt a special attraction to this kind of fanciful stories. This is the main reason why, when I was pondering on the topic for my TFM, the only certainty I had in mind was that I wanted to delve into the wonderful realm of fairy tales and folk stories. If, at the beginning, I used to approach them as an avid reader, eager to plunge into these worlds of fantasy, as time has gone by, I have developed a keen interest in some other aspects, such as their hidden meanings, their status within the literary canon, or their contemporary rewritings in the light of modern literary theories and critical approaches, to name just a few. Today the sexual and social messages conveyed by fairy tales are widely recognized. Children have been largely socialized through the messages concealed in these narratives—particularly girls—as lessons to be learnt in the transition from adolescence to maturity. But there can also be found discourses of challenge and contestation inside the cracks of these normative discourses since, as Cristina Bacchilega exposes, “a lot will depend not only on where cultural productions is located but also on where and from which knowledge systems, cultural *habitus*<sup>1</sup>, and critical agendas the reader or interpreter accesses the fairy-tale web” (qtd. in Orme 94).

As Bacchilega states, many critics, such as Jack Zipes, Maria Tatar or Ruth B. Bottigheimer, among others,

have taught us the value of breaking this magic spell. Looking with Dorothy behind the curtain of Oz to investigate the mechanisms of enchantment, their research has revealed how the workings of this magic, however benevolent, rely on privilege and repression. Clever and

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis in original.

industrious boys, dependent and hard-working girls, and well-behaved “normal” children in general—such products demonstrate how the fairy tale’s magic act requires not only social violence and appropriation but a careful balance of threats and rewards. (*Postmodern Fairy Tales* 6)

Therefore each piece of fairy tale contains multiple layers and meanings so that we can appropriate and interpret those texts on our own, according to our particular reading. As it will be seen in the analysis of *The Wizard of Oz*, the reappropriation of works of art has been done from a manifold of perspectives including the ones carried out from the Queer Theory or Women’s studies. Indeed, “[q]ueerness<sup>2</sup> bears a double meaning in studies of children’s literature, in the sense that these fictions often depict a world where oddness—which can be understood as asexual queerness—is embraced as a chief narrative value” (Pugh 218).

This work intends to cast some light upon these hidden meanings through a brief analysis of both fairy tales in general and a selected tale, L. Frank Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900). It should not be forgotten that,

[a]s folk and fairy tale, the tale of magic produces wonder precisely through its seductively concealed exploitation of the conflict between its *normative* function, which capitalizes on the comforts of consensus, and its *subversive* wonder, which magnifies the powers of transformation. (Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales* 7)<sup>3</sup>

Through this examination, we are going to discover something new about fairy tales and its cultural importance and, in the process, we may learn something about ourselves, as well.

## 1.1. HYPOTHESIS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this study is to expose how damaging some patriarchal cultural practices have been to women’s empowerment and self-fulfillment, and how the narratives I examine here—namely fairy tales—have served, in many instances, for female to get around some of the constraints imposed on their artistic gifts, their everyday lives, and their personal growth as individuals, on the basis of sex and gender roles. We should keep in mind that fairy tales played “and continue to play a privileged role in the production of genre” (Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales* 10). Once this problem has been

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<sup>2</sup> Emphasis in original.

<sup>3</sup> All italicized words have emphasis in original.



unveiled, I think it is open room for other discourses that challenge and question the official ones, and that may be a change in the established social practices. Because one should not forget that the main global obstacle to woman's lack of agency lies in the constraints imposed by patriarchal ideology on the female's free will, mind and body, a social system that hinges largely on the tacit consent about her subordinate position in society in relation to her male counterpart. This is immediately obvious when it comes to classic fairy tales since

[p]rejudices against women, especially old women and their chatter, belong in the history of fairy tale's changing status, for the pejorative image of the gossip was sweetened by influences from the tradition of the Sibyls and the cult of Saint Anne, until the archetypal crone by the hearth could emerge as a mouthpiece of homespun wisdom. (Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde* xxiv)

The approach of this study differs from the old fashioned and reductionist approach that considers fairy tales as narratives just for children—with a one-dimensional interpretation—with the clear aim of instructing them in the traditional beliefs and moral codes prevailing in a given society. Since the second half of the twentieth century onwards, there has been a significant upsurge in the popularity of fairy tales, mostly in Western countries, becoming an integral part, in one way or another, of contemporary literature and popular culture. This is particularly evident in the entertainment industry: from commercials or cartoons to the state-of-the-art fields of graphic arts; from videogames and 3D apps to TV shows and feature films, to name just a few. Moreover, they have even been formally incorporated into many university curricula and, in recent times, copious amounts of scholarly articles and seminal works have been written about folk and fairy stories, on their symbolic meanings, and upon their position of public prominence in our current information society. Certainly, fairy tales are a constant presence in our daily lives, whether we are acutely aware of it or not. And, if we hone in on their profound influence wielded in the artistic and literary works,

[c]reative writers seem equally inspired by the fairy tale, which provides them with well-known material pliable to political, erotic, or narrative manipulation. Belittled, yet pervasive and institutionalized, fairy tales are thus produced and consumed to

accomplish a variety of social functions in multiple contexts and in more or less explicitly ideological ways. (Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales* 2-3)

Thus, this thesis seeks to support the idea that fairy tales, as a genre that for a long time was looked down upon—firstly labelled as ‘old wives’ tales’ (Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales*) and later as literature intended for the youngest, has taken advantage of the gaps and voids left within the wefts of the cultural fabric to fill them up with significance, as a fertile soil. In fact, as Gilbert and Gubar affirm, “myths and fairy tales often both state and enforce culture’s sentences with greater accuracy than more sophisticated texts” (36). Therefore, by challenging some patriarchal assumptions on gender normativity, on both sexual practices and identity construction, fairy tales have given voice to silenced subjects and distorted subjectivities, offering new spaces for veiled meanings. However, fairy tales have also “served conservative and emancipatory purposes” (Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales* 6), at the same time.

Hence, in order to study these issues, this work carries out the analysis of a very well-known book, Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, highlighting the importance of the text in the dialogic play between literature and popular culture. As well as with the fairy tales, the text is fraught with hidden meanings that, on the one side underpin patriarchal values but, on the other side, create spaces of resistance to the dominant discourses on gender and identity. The study of the tale and of its cultural reappropriations exposes the evils of a system of values and beliefs that points the finger at women and non-normative identities, ostracizing and displacing them to the margins of society; or worst, seeks to undermine their rights. However, among these dominant spheres of power, some discourses of empowerment and assertiveness appear among the cracks and crevices of the official ones.

## **1.2. STATE OF THE ART**

Fairy tales owe a debt of gratitude to Greek and Roman myths but they cannot be considered fairy tales, at least not in the modern sense. It was not until the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century that the literary fairy tale emerged, particularly thanks to the French literary salons,

where these stories rooted in fantasy found its way, as it will be discussed later. Two names appear above the rest: Charles Perrault and Madame d'Aulnoy. In fact, “D’Aulnoy first fairy tale begins the “modernist” re-creation of oral folklore, French medieval literature, and Greco-Roman mythology to celebrate fairies along with their high standards of love and secular morality” (Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale* 33-34).

At the end of the eighteenth century, with the advent of Romanticism, an awakened interest in traditional folk stories kindled, and people learnt the importance of preserving their rich popular heritage. Moreover, “they began drawing important connections to the rich literary tradition of fairy tales and their connection to oral traditions” (110). They saw the emergence of a strong feeling of nationalism which shook the whole of Europe. In line with that spirit, the Brothers Grimm pioneered a ground-breaking work in folklore by undertaking the task of collecting and editing fairy tales, principally from the native German oral tradition: “The Grimms grew up in the febrile atmosphere of German Romanticism, which involved intense nationalism and, in support of that, a fascination with the supposedly deep, pre-rational culture of the German peasantry, the Volk” (Acocella). If the literary fairy tale made its entrance on scene in French courtly salons, the oral fairy tales did it as a result of nineteenth-century growing nationalism that sought to recover what they considered the real soul of the ‘volk’, their vernacular culture.

Hence, the Brothers Grimm championed for the establishment of a shared cultural tradition, and, all at once, they contributed to the nation-building process. The Brother Grimm’s oeuvre was the role model for many other writers all over Europe: Hans Christian Andersen in Denmark, or the Scottish poet George MacDonald and the Irish poet William Butler Yeats, in Great Britain, are some of the most recognisable names to us. Likewise, in the late nineteenth century—what Jack Zipes labels ‘the golden age of folklore’—, and thanks to “the collecting and study of folk undertaken . . . by professionals outside the university” (Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale* 109), folklore began to be deemed an acceptable field of study. The main reason behind that change was the growing attention of people to oral traditions and folklife. As already mentioned, the Brother Grimm’s work was an inspiration to other collectors,

and as the formers, the followers held fast to the belief that these stories were representative of the spirit of a particular country, neglecting any cross-cultural influence among them. Nevertheless, thanks to the valuable work of ethnographers, who collected fairy tales all around the world, the close links among tales from the different countries could be proved, and researchers started to support the idea of cross-fertilization of experiences and stories among diverse cultures. Among these investigators, the Scottish writer Andrew Lang stands out (1844-1912). He contributed to the development to the field of anthropology—with publications on religion, mythology, and folklore.

Vladimir Propp's foundational studies of Russian folk tales opened the field for an academic approach to the discipline. His books *Morphology of the Tale* (1928) and *Historical Roots of the Wonder Tale* (1946)—and some other insightful articles regarding folk tales, such as “The Russian Folk Tale”—had a great impact on subsequent Western studies on fairy tales, mostly after his work was translated into English and other languages from the second half of the twentieth century onwards. Propp “believed that in order to establish what constituted a genre, one had to demonstrate that there was a constant repetition of functions in a large body of tales” (Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale* 65).

In the late sixties, due to the conflicts that emerged between the establishment and the civil rights and anti-war movements—as well as the subsequently renaissance of feminism, the fairy tale was seen as a mode of expression ideal to articulate “the power of the imagination, revolutionary transformation, political justice, and utopian hope” (Zipes, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale* 136-137). In addition,

[f]rom the nineteenth up through the 1960s, visual artists generally celebrated the opulent and extraordinary optimism of the fairy tale in diverse works—paintings, sculptures, illustrations, photographs, cartoons, and films. . . . Contemporary artists have approached fairy-tale topics from a critical and sceptical perspective, intent on disturbing viewers and reminding them that the world is out of joint and fairy tales offer no alternative to drab reality. Their subversive views of the fairy tale collide with traditional norms and conventional expectations of fairy-tale representations as well as the false, rosy images that the Disney Corporation and other popularizing artists and publishers have disseminated for close to one hundred years. (136)

Jack Zipes's seminal book *Breaking the Magic Spell*, which was first published in 1979, is a thorough study on the socio-historical forces behind the development of fairy tales. They have been a constant source of fascination to readers both young and adults, for a long time, and their pervasive influence on society is far from diminishing. This work examines these tales critically and tries "not only to understand their utopian roots and emancipatory potential but also to lay bade the false magic and deceptive allure of tales created by the culture industry" (Editors, Marvel & Tales 127). The same year, Lutz Röhrich's work *Folktales and Reality* was published and, in 1991, was translated from German into the English language. It can be considered as "a major study of the manifold relationships between the folktale and human reality" (Editors, Marvel & Tales 127).

Around that time, other studies framed the fairy tales within the study of social, economic and historical conditions. However, Bruno Bettelheim, an American Austrian-born psychologist, took a different stance with his book *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), where he examined fairy tales with an "ahistorical psychoanalytic" (128) perspective. In fact, there have been countless analyses under the light of Freudian, Jungian, and other psychological perspectives. A different approach is that of Ruth B. Bottingheimer who carried out a sociohistorical analysis of fairy tales in her book *Fairy Tales and Society* (1986), an important collection of essays "explor[i]ng the interpretation of fairy tales and society . . . [intending] to acquaint both the scholarly and the lay fairy tale-reading public with contemporary German research" (qtd. in Editors, Marvel & Tales 128). Zipes points out that Walter Burkert's *Creation of the Sacred: Tracks of Biology in Early Religions* (1996)—a work that develops some ideas regarding the cultural and historical evolution of religion—was influential in the study of folk tales and folklore (*The Irresistible Fairy Tale* 37).

One of the major contributions of Zipes within the fairy-tale studies was to be able to "reference . . . and adapt . . . the critical perspectives of those German scholars who, beginning in the 1970s and '80s mounted a critical re-assessment of the fairy tale and of children's literature" (Haase qtd. in Editors, Marvel & Tales 128). These influential works paved the way for Anglo-

American fairytale criticism which exerted a significant impact on Zipes's work, just as his production on fairy tales has had a profound influence upon later researchers on the field. He highlights the importance of oral traditions concerning folk and fairy tales—without underestimating the key role of the print in the dissemination of literary tales—in the children's socialization process, and he “explor[es] the interconnections between the oral folk tale, the literary fairy tale, and the fairy tale as film” (Zipes qtd. in Editors, *Marvel & Tales* 128). Many other researchers from diverse fields have also shown interest in the study of fairy tales. Hugo Cerda's *Ideología y Cuentos de Hadas* (1985) (social and economic perspectives), Jean Campbell Cooper's *Fairy Tales: Allegories of the Inner Life* (1983) (symbolic meanings) or Marie-Louise von Franz (1915-1988) (Jungian psychological interpretations), are among them.

Lately, there has been a line of research that has focused on the rewriting of classic fairy tales, most of them from a postmodern stance. Although the rewriting of classical stories is not a new phenomenon these days, it has undergone a boom both in print-based and through audiovisual materials. According to Zipes, there exist two major tendencies in these artistic recreations. The first one is the remaking and rewriting of canonical classical tales, with strong disapproval of its patriarchal undertones, particularly concerning women and sex representations. The second one “consists of paintings, sculptures, and photographs that draw on an assortment of fairy-tale fragments to evoke a sense of wonder, if not bafflement” (*The Irresistible Fairy Tale* 137). In the revamping of these traditional texts, Zipes draws the attention to two contemporary artists: the Portuguese-born British visual artist Paula Rego—known for her paintings and prints based on storybooks—and the West German-born American artist Kiki Smith. In addition, and regarding literary retellings, other relevant names are the American writer of children's books Robin McKinley (*Deerskin* (1993), wherein she retells Perrault's story about Donkeyskin), the late English novelist Angela Carter (*The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979), a collection of short fiction stories based on fairytales and folk tales), and many other authors whose rewritings have tackled issues from feminist or multicultural perspectives, reevaluating primarily Eurocentric patriarchal discourses which lie beneath these traditional narratives. We see

how, over time, there have been ideological changes in the reshaping of fairy tales that are reflected on the chosen topics, the shift from main characters to secondary ones as the protagonists of the stories, or the reversal of traditional plots. For example, “the stress placed on gender and power in fairy-tale studies also carries over, in one way or another, into new versions” (Orme, 90).

Since the last quarter of the last century, academia has turned its eyes to the scholarly study of fairy tales and children’s literature. The consolidation of cultural studies helped to develop the multidisciplinary nature of both of them. Different journals have undertaken the task of analysing this field of knowledge: “Marvels & Tales”, “Lion and the Unicorn”, “Children's Literature Association Quarterly” or “Journal of American Folklore” are some of the most acknowledged. Also, some publishers have edited and compiled companions and encyclopedias on folk and fairy tales. However, Zipes believes that the “great progress that had been made in folklore studies and ethnography in the twentieth century has reached a standstill in the twenty-first century” (*The Irresistible Fairy Tales* 109). In his opinion,

[f]olk and fairy tales are still read and taught in universities and the public sphere, but there are few places where serious historical, anthropological, and ethnological work is being maintained as well as supported, and the mass media have basically continued to spread ignorant notions about fairy tales. (109)

Nonetheless, there are still various researchers who are consistent and rigorous in their investigations, such as the American academic Maria Tatar (*The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (1987) or *Off With Their Heads! Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood* (1993), among others), the Canadian author Margaret Atwood—whose vast work is inspired, in many occasions, by fairy tales and myths, or the English novelist Marina Warner (*From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (1994) or *Six Myths Of Our Time: Little Angels, Little Monsters, Beautiful Beasts, and More* (1995)), to name just a few. One thing is certain: the presence and pervasiveness of fairy and folk tales within both scholarly and popular culture are a sign of the good health they enjoy.

Regarding Baum’s *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), it can be said that the story is firmly established since being published, and it has become a

fundamental part of the cultural life of many generations of readers and spectators. It has been translated or adapted to many languages. The 1939 MGM film version is its most well-known adaption, and it can be asserted—with no doubt, that it has turned out to be more popular and influential than the original itself. The tale has spread across all kind of cultural and social areas fields. Not only has the book gained fame and success in popular culture, but also it has captured the academic imagination, too. In *The Universe of Oz: Essays on Baum's Series and Its Progeny* (2010), the editors Kevin K. Durand and Mary K. Leigh compile seventeen essays around some Ozian topics. As they state in the preface to this work,

the universe of *The Wizard of Oz* has piqued far more than passing interest as entertainment. The World of Oz has been among the most fertile grounds for discussions of everything from imperialism to friendship, from economics to urban planning, from psychology to philosophy to religion to literature. The spin-offs and tie-ins that Baum's world has inspired have been far from pale imitations. Gregory Maguire's *Wicked* trilogy . . . has taken up the baton admirably, refocusing the discussions to matters of good and evil, objectivism and perspective, race, gender and sex, among others. In the intervening years, *The Wiz* provided an invaluable source for discussions of race in America (and in Oz). This is to say little about the vast reach into the cultural psyche of one generation after another, from literature to commercials. (1)

The editors wonder about the appropriateness or not of the popular culture scholarship, reaching to the inevitable conclusion that it is not only appropriate but also necessary because of “its enduring legacy, its far-reaching influence on the language of culture, or its firm grip on the imagination of countless people” (2). And they further emphasize that “there is no question that popular culture vehicles are among the most effective for exploring topics of critical importance” (3). Therefore, there exist numerous articles and books which have as their central focus the exploration of meanings, characters, motifs, plots, and so, concerning the universe of Oz, in many and varied communication vehicles: in print and electronic media, advertisement, cartoons, audiovisual multimedia, visual arts... For example,

[i]Individuals such as Henry Littlefield, John Beebe, Joey Green, and others have interpreted the story and have found many different theories to go along with it. Theories include parallels to Populism, Buddhist Taoism, Jungian Psychology, etc.



The two main theories that make the most sense are Henry Littlefield's theory on the story representing Populism during the time period which Baum wrote the book, and John Beebe's theory on how the story goes hand in hand with C.G. Jung's Jungian Psychology. (Houlberg)

This thesis may also be a modest contribution to the enrichment of the Oz topic and the fairy tales in general.

### **1.3. METHODOLOGY**

The type of research conducted on the chosen topic is a qualitative one, and it is intended to prove the harmful effect of patriarchal ideology on notions revolving around femininity, normative masculinities, and gender roles in the field of literature, particularly within the fairy tales. Through a systematic examination and analysis of some existing documentary sources, this study will try to decipher hidden significances that were encoded, be it consciously or unconsciously, beyond the literal meaning of the words themselves.

Therefore, for this purpose, I have selected a representative sample of printed works written by prestigious scholars in the fields of children's literature and fairy tales, such as Bruno Bettelheim, Maria Tatar, Jack Zipes or Marina Warner, and from primary sources such as Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* or Gregory Maguire's *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West*. I have also examined a wide range of articles that tackle issues concerning the development of the fairy tale throughout history, their impact on popular culture, and their meanings and readings. Similarly, I have analysed many pieces of writing about the chosen work, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, which have been instrumental to the development of this work. This thesis is made up of two differentiated parts. The first part revolves around the fairy tale itself: its origins and development, its meaning and readings, etc. and the second part is devoted to the analysis of Frank L. Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and some cultural rewritings of this work.

### **1.4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The chief purpose of this work is to offer a thorough and academic study on the fairy tale, and the folk story too, particularly through an influential work of

literature which has exerted a huge influence in popular culture since its inception, L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. The study will be mainly carried out in light of the Gender Literary Criticism. Given the eminently eminent interdisciplinary nature of Gender Studies—a field devoted to the analysis of the construction of gender and sexual identities, and gendered representations, within certain cultural contexts throughout history, this work will sometimes draw upon some other theories that may be relevant to this research. In fact, not only Gender Studies—and its critical approaches such as Feminism, Men's Studies or Queer Theory—deal with issues related to gender and identity, but also fields such as political science, anthropology, media studies, psychoanalysis, law or medicine, among others, explore the intersections and dynamics between their subjects of study and the categories of sexuality and gender. Consequently, Gender Studies frequently has embraced methodologies and approaches from a wide range of fields of knowledge.

Hence, the questions relating to gender and identity within fairy tales, and particularly in the fairy tale subject to analysis, are intended to be tackled from a multidisciplinary perspective, albeit its main approach is going to be carried out from the viewpoint of Gender Studies. Not surprisingly, in children's literature, and popular culture, characters are mostly gendered. Our first encounters with literature as children should have “help[ed] to shape our views” (Goodman 16) on society and cultural values. But, “[i]f we take a quick look at some of the most popular children's story books, we can quickly see that gender inequalities are represented there” (16), which means that there exists an unequal representation of one gender over the other, and the social roles assigned to them are also very different in nature and importance. Therefore, most of the leading characters we find in these accounts are males and, according to Goodman, they are so “for a reason. They serve a function to do with language and power in a male-dominated world” (17). Consequently, by and large, it has been quite difficult for girls to identify with strong female role models because they have been practically non-existent. Widely, there have been, until quite recently, either a heroine that passively awaits to be rescued from her tragic fate by an energetic male hero, or an evil and wicked witch who

finally gets her longed-for punishment for her transgressions against patriarchal order.

This thesis intends to dig deeper into the development of these literary genres in order to explore, among other gender issues, the patriarchal ideology underlying these narratives, the challenges to this prevailing stance, and the stereotyped female—and by extension male—characters which have been shaped around the dichotomous configuration of evil versus good, such as the dusky-complexion potion-brewing devious hag set against the blonde-haired, blue-eyed and pretty-faced fairy godmother who is a paragon of virtue. Conventionally, women have not been given equality within a social order that has actively fostered gender discrimination, sexist stereotypes and misogynist attitudes. And, obviously, the literary field has not been immune to these long-standing predispositions.

Gender is a constructed sociocultural category “influenced by stereotypes about ‘female’ and ‘male’ behaviour that exist in our attitudes and beliefs” (Goodman vii). Virginia Woolf’s words perfectly illustrate the actual role performed by women in Western societies throughout history: “Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.” (31). However, we should bear in mind that these social constructs have also had a negative effect upon masculine identities, even though it is a fact that women are the ones who have suffered the most from the overbearing patriarchal ideology. Theorizing not just about women’s conditions but also about men’s lives, and non-normative sexual identities within patriarchal society, was primarily due to a gradual shift in the academia from Women’s Studies—an interdisciplinary field which had its origin in the second-wave feminist movement—towards the more encompassing approaches of Gender Studies and Queer Theory. Certainly, this circumstance was as a clear

manifestation of the realization that any change in the status of women will involve some change in that of men . . . [and of a way] to explore the fluctuating constitution of hegemonic and subordinate forms of masculinity. Far from assuming the polarized analyses of some forms of early second-wave feminism in which ‘all men’ oppressed ‘all women’, sexual politics currently takes as its focus the transgression of all existing gender boundaries. (Kemp and Squires 11)

Looking back, we could conclude that the pervasive Judeo-Christian ideology—that the Church Fathers passed on through generations—has tinged Western cultural practices with negative stereotypes and deep-rooted prejudices, forged over the centuries, which have been largely gendered-biased and that, traditionally, have allocated women a marginalized place. And so, the allotment of gender roles to women, which have underpinned the dominant ideology, has relied upon a set of binary polarities in the construction of female identities, especially in the trite dichotomy between the ‘whore’—a debased woman eager to destroy the man by undermining and subverting his authority—and the ‘virgin’—a flawless lady whose virtue enhances male’s merits and serves as a mirror where he can shape and augment his own identity (Woolf 30). And indeed, such a system of beliefs have fostered that “the most mediocre of males feels himself a demigod as compared with women” (Beauvoir qtd. in Rossi 684). For centuries, Western humanism tended to privilege male speech—hence, endowed him with agency—and, all at once, the woman was constantly displaced from the public spaces to the private sphere, where her voice was either silenced or reworded, her progress hampered and thwarted, and her body subjected to surveillance and control; or even worse, her true self locked in physical or mental attics.

Moreover, women were reified as mere commodities for men’s transactions and deprived of their selves in order to be repossessed by alien forgers who crafted new made-up identities for them. And so, patriarchal ideology enshrined men by considering that “humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being” (Horton). Thus, it is no wonder that, with such a misogynist outlook upon women, the bulk of writers’ works frequently held up the basic tenets which articulated the language of patriarchy and that, whether consciously or not, permeated the basis of Western cultural patterns which, first and foremost, sought to foster male-centred discourses in their descriptions of *the feminine*, because “language doesn’t merely describe identity but actually produces moral and perhaps even physical identity” (Bersani qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 11). Nevertheless, women sometimes found means to challenge male dominance within the narrow limits imposed by the patriarchal discourse, being

notably the writing activity which “has historically been a subversive act for a woman in a culture which assumes that . . . ‘Literature cannot be the business of a woman’s life, and it ought not to be’” (Gilbert and Gubar xvi).

Although women have largely gained their access to the public sphere in our contemporary Western society, and formally they are regarded as equal partners to men, as a matter of fact, unfortunately, there are still too many instances of gender discrimination, misogynist attitudes, and sexist stereotypes. Patriarchal discourses on women are deeply rooted in the social fabric, and embedded in the collective consciousness, sometimes in a very subtle way. So, in the face of this situation, feminist and women studies have theorized about the status of women in Western cultural tradition. According to Michael Ryan:

Feminism asks why women have played a subordinate role to men in human societies. It is concerned with how women’s lives have changed throughout history, and it asks what about women’s experience is different from men’s, either as a result of an essential ontological or psychological difference or as a result of historical imprinting and social construction. Feminist literary criticism studies literature by women for how it addresses or expresses the particularity of women’s lives and experience. And it studies the male-dominated canon in order to understand how men have used culture to further their domination of women. (101)

With the construction of a set of binary oppositions, it was sought to assert men’s rule over women. In doing so, what was nothing but cultural practices were turned into biological determinism and gendered discourses since, obviously, “Patriarchy did not give birth to women out of its spare rib, nor has it ever totally conquered women, hence its elaborate strategies for keeping them in subjection” (Clark 159). Traditionally, one way to wield their authority has been through the control of the female’s body and sexuality, a great source of anxiety to patriarchy that has largely deemed women’s body as a ‘locus’ where male could exert power and domination. In fact, to exercise control over a body entails the dominion of the whole self; so Irigaray argues that “[m]en . . . have always appropriated women’s reproductive powers for their own (self-)idealizing ends . . . exchanged between men to equate them as exchangeable commodities in the status and marriage markets” (qtd. in Ryan 103).

Therefore, rebel bodies, considered as castrating threats to men—epitomized in fairy tales particularly by witches and stepmothers, have frequently been embodied by strong women, often portrayed in the literary canon as ‘madwomen in the attic’. Thus, feminist literary criticism “seeks to be at once critical and enabling. It takes issue with the way the male-dominated canon has represented women and it finds in the literary evidence signs of a counter-narrative, an alternative story of women’s experience” (Ryan 104). For a very long time, woman’s station in life became the negative side and the symbol of alterity concerning the binary opposition male/female given that, as Hélene Cixous states,

[t]hrough dual, hierarchical oppositions. Superior/Inferior. Myths, legends, books. Philosophical systems. Everywhere (where ordering intervenes, where a law what is thinkable by oppositions (dual, irreconcilable; or sublatale [sic], dialectical) . . . Organization by hierarchy makes all conceptual organization subject to man. Male privilege, shown in the opposition between *activity* and *passivity*, which he uses to sustain *himself*. (Qtd. in Kemp and Squires 232)<sup>4</sup>

Our Western society has actively sought to underpin and perpetuate the authority of the patriarchal discourses upon two solid pillars of the so-called inherited tradition: the Graeco-Latin mythology and the Bible, resulting in the shaping of some fixed identities deeply rooted on dual polarizations, wherein one pole has been invested with positive qualities while the other one tinged with way more unfavourable attributes: day/night, white/black, culture/nature, activity/passivity, man/woman,... Both of these fictional accounts served as a cornerstone to the development of a social order which viewed with suspicion any hint of alterity or deviant behaviour (Miranda 83). Therefore, the authorities in control eagerly strove for creating disciplined and/or subaltern subjects, as well as docile bodies, employing repressive structures and practices which comprised the control of the language itself, a powerful tool to naturalize what was actually nothing more than cultural constructions forged by the leading groups. Such a submission of the individuals to the power structures manifested itself, dramatically, in the silencing of certain social groups, especially of a vast majority of the body of the society, namely women.

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<sup>4</sup> All words have emphasis in original.

Consequently, I think that patriarchal ideology, definitely, should be indebted to literature for its significant contribution to the dissemination of the dominant ideology and systems of beliefs since

the fictions and narratives of a society contribute as fundamentally to its character as its laws and economy and political arrangements, . . . [and] the dimension of the ‘imaginary’ is too often overlooked in the struggles to define the nature of men, of women, of children, to express exclusion and belonging.” (Warner, *Six Myths of our Time* xvii)

So, virtually since we were toddlers, and almost unnoticeably, we have been immersed in a delusive process of naturalization—where, in fact, there has just been a cultural artifact—of certain normalized behaviours and fixed identities, which have become an essential part of the collective imagination of our Western societies, and that have led us to internalize most of the tenets posited by the hegemonic powers, particularly those spinning around women’s experiences. And according to Jack Zipes, the folk tale has played its part in that process:

[T]he origins of the literary fairy tale can be traced to male phantasies about women and sexuality . . . [and t]he industry of illustration has long been controlled by men . . . and those ‘male illustrators were interpreters and mediators of the fairy-tale texts, and they projected their sexual phantasies through the images they composed’” (Qtd. in Lappas 116).

In the introduction of Marina Warner’s *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and their Tellers* (1994), there appears a short fable that she borrows from Angela Carter’s first anthology of fairy tales which can be worthy to be reproduced in whole because it conveys a precise idea of the intimate connection between women and storytelling, which is rooted in folk wisdom and lore.

While a poor man’s wife in the village thrives, the Sultana in the palace grows thinner and scrapper by the minute. The Sultan summons the poor man and demands to know the secret of his wife’s happiness. ‘Very simple’, he replies. ‘I find her meat of the tongue.’ The Sultan sends out for all the tongues money can buy—ox tongues and lambs’ tongues and larks’ tongues; still his sad Sultana withers away. He orders his litter, makes her change places with the poor man’s wife; she immediately starts to thrive, becoming the picture of health, plumper, rosier, gayer. Meanwhile, in the palace, her replacement languishes, and soon has become a scrawny and miserable as the former queen.

For the tongue meats that the poor man feeds the women are not material, of course. They are fairy tales, stories, jokes, songs; he nourishes them on talk, he wraps them in language; he banishes melancholy by refusing silence. Storytelling makes women thrive. (xv)

In the sections that follow, these topics are developed in depth. I will seek to unravel the tangled skein of fairy tales, its meanings and their impact on popular culture. Besides, I will try to expose how fairy tales have served to underpin hegemonic discourses but, at the same time, have fostered spaces of resistance and contestation.

## **2. CHILDREN’S LITERATURE AND THE FAIRY TALE**

As said above, in recent times, the research on children’s literature and folk and fairy tales has become an activity of growing importance within the scholarly circles. Similarly, there is a considerable amount of rewritings based on fairytale characters, plots or motifs which have brought to light the profound significance that these stories that we listened to when we were kids are still attractive and appealing to an adult audience. Therefore, the next section is devoted to the history, meaning and importance of children’s literature and, particularly, of fairy tales.

### **2.1. CHILDREN’S LITERATURE**

There has been a changing definition of childhood in Western culture over the years. Likewise, children’s position in society has substantially shifted since the early modern period. As a matter of fact, children from previous centuries were treated quite differently from today’s. This does not imply that they were not mainly loved and nurtured within their households, on the whole. However, with lower life expectancy—mainly due to spreading diseases, widespread poverty, and high maternal mortality ratio, it was not uncommon that many children were left orphans from very early ages. Unfortunately, that happened so often that the orphan became a central literary character, and a political concern to public legislators, social thinkers and educators, from the mid-eighteenth and all through the nineteenth centuries. At the same time, as definitions of childhood and children gradually were changing so were their



material conditions of living, particularly regarding education and child labour. Child abuse and neglect were still critical issues to be addressed for nineteenth-century society, though. That was quite a common occurrence, deeply rooted in cultural and religious history:

Over the centuries infanticide, ritual sacrifice, exposure, mutilation, abandonment, harsh discipline, and exploitation of child labor have been only some of the ways in which children have been mistreated. Infanticide—the killing of newborn infants with the explicit or implied consent of parents and the community—has been a form of birth control, a way of avoiding the embarrassment [sic] of an illegitimate child, a method of disposing of a weak or deformed child, and a means of serving religious beliefs. Numerous religions have required that the first-born be sacrificed to an angry god. In some societies, female children were sacrificed because they were considered useless. Abandonment or exposure to the elements of a child who was unwanted or who could not be provided for was a form of infanticide that was common in ancient societies. (Mason 294)

Without resorting to such harsh and disproportionate measures, we should not lose sight of the fact that, until quite recently, in Western societies, physical punishment of children by their own parents, educators, and any other people endowed with parental authority, was judged necessary to keep discipline, ward off evil spirits, educate one's child, or perform religious observances, as a well-known aphorism states: 'to spare the rod is to spoil the child'. That negative ideological stance upon children permeated the entire social and cultural fabric and, by extension, literary production. Thus, it can be pointed out that bad parenting was not rare, as many fairy tales expose: abandonment (Hansel and Gretel's parents), neglectfulness (Cinderella's father), or even cruel parental figures (Snow White's stepmother).

So actually, "[i]t was not until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and only among the upper classes, that the modern idea of childhood as a distinct phase of life began to emerge" (Stannard 456). Up to that time, there was not a proper childhood period, but from the age of six or seven onwards, there was a sudden changeover from infancy to adulthood. Regarding children's literature, Philippe Ariès, French historian of the family and childhood, asserts that it "did not appear until "the end of the 17th century, at the same time as the awareness of childhood"." (qtd. in Stannard 458). To that date, literature, including folk tales, was aimed, by and large, at an adult reader, without much

consideration for children's wishes or preferences, as we will see in the following sections. Nonetheless, the Romantic period—at the turn of the eighteenth century—marked a significant turning point with regard to these deep-seated attitudes and practices, since childhood was put at the core of its artistic debates, bringing to the front the role society expected children to play, and what it meant to be a child. From then on, the foundations were laid for the development of a modern concept of childhood and children's literature.

We must keep in mind that books written for children present some remarkable particularities; one of the most noticeable features is that readers do not procure their own material but the selection they have access to is mediated by adults' choices, particularly of relatives' or educators'; albeit not only by them; editors, writers and even legislators, among others, have largely had a word to say about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of books published for children. Consequently, by depending on adult's inclinations or the system of values of the child's elders—who eagerly seek to perpetuate their ideology—, children's literature was chiefly devoted to disseminating mores, knowledge and manners among young readers. Indeed,

[t]he vast majority of children's stories invite the child to identify with the adult's idea of what the child should be, leaving unquestioned the authority structure of adult and child always implied in the text and by the adult's reading the story to the child. Children's stories . . . are more often than not adult propaganda that serves to confirm for the child the hierarchical relationship between the adult and the child. They, in effect, reproduce the dominant culture's ideological status quo. (Zornado xv)

Another important characteristic to take into consideration is regarding power relations, as quoted above, since children's literature is not built on the basis of equality or, at least, not as much as in the one between an author (virtually all adults) and a grown-up reader, but it is based on an asymmetrical relationship. In the latter case, there exists a clear association between both parties “dependent on a shared understanding of language” (Cogan Thacker and Webb 3), whereas one “of the purposes of . . . stories, for children, is to admit them into an adult language system and, thus, one of the defining features of children's books is the tendency of the voice of the narrator to acknowledge the reader's ‘apprenticeship’ to the written word” (3-4). In fact, adult narrators sometimes treat them with somewhat patronizing and condescending and even

contemptuous attitudes, as in *Alice in Wonderland* wherein “the narrator . . . . delights in repeatedly exposing Alice’s ignorance of geography or mathematics . . . [or] the rude Hatter who calls her ‘stupid’” (Knoepfmacher 9).

In literature, there exists an intimate but deferred connection (in time and space) between an author—who plays with words and ideas in order to convey meaning— and a reader—the decipherer and interpreter of an encoded message based on shared linguistic, historical and cultural values. In the case of children’s literature, that relationship is problematic because it poses a challenge to the very relationship between reader and author. The incontrovertible fact that books for children are written by adults complicates matters. Actually, “the project of writing for children becomes a complex and ambiguous pursuit, one that articulates the changing nature of authorship in the face of social change” (Cogan Thacker and Webb 5). C.S. Lewis liked reading fairy tales without considering this a sign of immaturity, thus “implying that books written for children must be considered in relation not just to a young readership, but with regard to all readers” (qtd. in Cogan Thacker and Webb 7).

In this way, literature written for the youngest has been deemed by many scholars to be of a particular significance regarding children’s education. But, for long, their literary and artistic values were underestimated and, until recently, their importance within the literary canon, and for the history of literature, was downplayed or minimized. However, “[c]hildren’s literature specialists have demonstrated repeatedly that the exclusion of these texts belies the complexity of their engagement with literary questions. . . . [They] embrace the aesthetic of any particular age. . . . [and] often anticipate, and perhaps inspire, innovation” (Cogan Thacker and Webb 2). While the vast majority of stories created for kids and youths have not been given adequate attention as literary works, it is true that a few have achieved appropriate recognition in cultural and literary studies; books such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and *Through the Looking-Glass* (1871), J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1904), C. S. Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956), or the most recent J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) saga feature prominently among these.

When it comes to books written for children, British publishers and authorities have traditionally held two conflicting views around the creation of literary products: on the one hand, a strong interest in the search for didacticism and realism and, on the other hand, an aesthetic taste for fantasy and entertainment (Cogan Thacker and Webb). But since The Brothers Grimm's collections were translated into English and particularly, at the turn of the nineteenth century onwards, the disagreement between these divergent viewpoints was settled in favour of the second one. The publishing market was flooded with fantasy books: Lewis Carroll's books on Alice—as mentioned above, Beatrix Potter's *Tales of Peter Rabbit* (1902), Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), or L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) in America—both traditions, British and American, can be viewed as a rather homogeneous body of work with common concerns. Either way, whether for educational purposes or pure enjoyment, we should not forget that any text is a context-dependent cultural artifact which has been produced within a particular social system, and has been given shape by certain beliefs and principles, seeking to instill in its readers the values of the prevailing ideology—either explicitly or implicitly, whether conscious or not, at the time of its writing. Therefore, if children's literature is widely acknowledged to have a distinctly formative function during childhood, the reading experiences they could enjoy will shape their worldview and will “define the relationship between the teller and the told” (4).

From a sociological point of view, for most of human history, children were rarely regarded as being autonomous individuals, in possession of a proper identity distinct from those of grownups', and they used to be thought of as miniature adults, expected to behave like adults. Such thinking was about to change with the arrival of a new worldview and, more importantly, as a result of a radical transformation of society and economy brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Besides, “[w]ith the advent of Darwinism, children were increasingly looked at through an evolutionary lens and aligned with earlier stages of evolution” (Talairach-Vielmas, “The Victorian Press” 426). Western traditional cultural values and paradigms also underwent a significant metamorphosis. Unlike previously, during the Romantic period, writers were

completely enthralled with the image of the child, in the hope of regaining some of the lost innocence of their own childhood. Through their writings, they revealed a deep yearning to bring back vivid recollections of their early years, and they felt, in the meantime, little twinges of nostalgia of those bygone days. Indeed, many scholars hold the idea that such an emphasis upon the figure of the child by Romanticism was crucial for the development of children's literature, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. These authors' aesthetics, which drew upon the idealised version of the relationship between child readers and adult writers, directly appealed to the imagination and led to the literary construction of imaginary worlds.

But the zeitgeist of the nineteenth century also brought heated discussions—which lasted throughout the period—on education and upon the fostering of ethical and moral values for children, debates which mingled with artistic concerns and creative interests. Hence, we can see how these concepts around the figure of the child inspired prominent works such as Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789) or Wordsworth's poem "*Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*" (1807), wherein they depicted children's experiences for adult readers. These are two excellent illustrations, among others, of how Romantics contemplated childhood from adulthood; on the one side, the stark contrast between a pristine condition of blissful innocence—within an idyllic pastoral world—and an adult human existence full of corruption and repression, for Blake; and, on the other side, for Wordsworth, this was the echo of a profound regret for the loss of an Edenic state in which the child had a close connection with nature, a distant memory of a long-vanished paradise.

If Romantics focused on idealized childhood, fantasy became so popular among the Victorians that one may wonder what was the reason for such an interest. According to Matthew O. Grenby, this might be

linked to rapid social, economic and intellectual change. Social reformers like John Ruskin and William Morris may have seen in the fairytale tradition, with its medievalism and its privileging of individualism, honour and the 'old ways', an antidote to the industrial and urban society whose advance they regretted. ("Fantasy and Fairytale in Children's Literature")

That opinion is in line with Baum's masterpiece position, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*—the work chosen to be analysed—wherein self-sufficiency and individuality are celebrated. In fact,

Victorian male writers turned to the child in order to find compensations for a middle-class culture's division of the sexes into separate spheres. Whereas girls were kept at home and taught by mothers or governesses or older sisters, their brothers were sent away to school at an early age. The imaginative deprivation these boys felt . . . The nursery from which boys have been exiled is equated with a sustaining female imagination he wishes to recover. (Knoepfmacher 9)

The turn of the century was a period fraught with turmoil, anxiety and conflicts, both in England and in America, which left its imprint in literary production. Some critics see that time as a “defining moment for observing the processes by which the boundaries between high culture and popular culture are established and policed” (Pykett qtd. in Cogan Thacker and Webb 73). There was a clear interest in sexuality which—combined with a questioning in power relations between men and women—had a powerful impact on children's literature. Hence, in contrast to the preceding view on childhood held by the Romantics, Victorians did not long for a return to lost childhood, so their compositions were darker and gloomier. As Cogan Thacker and Webb point out,

[c]hildren as representatives of the past and as visible embodiments of the future, took on a strong emblematic value . . . The growing awareness of the importance of childhood to the adult consciousness was influenced by shifting power structures surrounding gender and sexuality. The radical rethinking required in reaction to Freud's theories of child sexuality, and the fetishing of childhood through the use of children's bodies in art during this period, is also reflected in both adult's and children's literature. (75)

In the twentieth century, there has been a considerable change in the perception of society and cultural artifacts, and children's literature has experienced a conspicuous success while the book market exploded. Besides, there has been a rising perception of the child as ‘the other’, and

as the fear of apocalypse grew more immediate, the need to offer children optimistic futures was more compelling, but more difficult. This unease, made more complex by the insights into the human mind provided by the increasing prominence of psychoanalytic ideas, made the image of the child more mysterious and threatening. (101)

There have been other radical transformations and shifts that have exerted a profound influence in literature: a rapid industrialization coupled with population growth; the rejection of grand narratives and religious principles; a budding interest in de-centred subjectivities and identities, and an emphasis on multiculturalism and diversity; a long-standing quarrel between high and popular culture;... All in all, children's literature has been influenced by the sociocultural and ideological milieu. Today, "it is precisely the nature of the task of writing for children, and the power relations entailed in the act, which forge a special link between children's literature and postmodern responses to cultural change" (139). On the other hand, the 'Disneyfication' of fairy tales has entailed a distortion of what classical fairy tales are and mean, by sweetening plots, enhancing positive qualities of characters, and portraying happy endings even to stories that did not have them. Yet, many other authors have presented stories completely detached from those sugar-coated versions. Literature written for young people represents a fast-growing market which is intimately linked to the audiovisual medium. Hence, books benefit from increased exposure to movies and TV shows, attracting both children and not so children, as the *Harry Potter*'s series has proved.

## **2.2. WHY FAIRY TALES MATTER**

Fairy tales have been around our lives since our earliest years, and they "have been part of Western culture for centuries . . . [being] the genre of fiction we choose to tell our youngest members, and they [also] provide the narrative tropes we return to in adulthood, as metaphors" (Smith, 424). It is common knowledge that, in our Western societies, every time we listen to, or read, the widely known stock phrase 'once upon a time' our minds—altogether with our senses—right away turn to easily categorize the story as a 'fairy tale', without a further and more in-depth thought, assuming the naturalization and normalization of a range of stereotypes and trite commonplaces: predictable patterns, archetypal characters, foreseeable plots and clichéd images. All these, by force of their constant reproduction within the cultural fabric, have remained seated on the Western collective imagination from ancient times, holding a cross-generational appeal for them. 'Symbolic Esperanto' is the suggestive term

that Marina Warner uses to describe the language employed in fairy tales, which are “acts of imagination . . . [with] certain kinds of characters . . . and certain recurrent motifs” (Warner, *Once upon a Time* xix). Therefore, no matter the vernacular a tale is written in, traditional lore and imagery are strongly evocative of a shared primeval culture and language. Another expression that perfectly encapsulates the same notion is the one coined by the English novelist A. S. Byatt, what she calls ‘the narrative grammar’ (xix), a phrase which conveys the idea of a repertory of communal memory whose elements have been recombined over and over, throughout human history, given rise to the set of folk stories we are acquainted with since our childhood.

Thereby, all of us have grown up listening to, reading or watching on the big screen—particularly by the watered-down and sweetened eyes of Disney which, I would point out, is by no means accidental—a fairly small array of children’s stories through which, almost unnoticeably, we have get into a process of acculturation that has turn into natural and customary some of the cultural tenets of the hegemonic power. That is because

literature and art cannot be fully understood without considering the socio-political-cultural context in which they are produced. In addition, the political nature of economics and technology is important to take into account. The forms, shapes, and messages of folk and fairy tales are determined by the conflicts in cultural fields of production in the public sphere. (Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell* ix)

Thus, it is a very healthy intellectual exercise to question, challenge, reappropriate, and rework the undercurrent assumptions of these familiar stories, and to teach to future generations that a different paradigm is not only possible but also absolutely necessary. As Zipes states, “[f]airy tales . . . can only be successful if they can copy themselves and are interpreted and revised successfully to address a society’s cultural needs and demands. Moreover, they will only be effective if they can mutate and blend in altered and adapted forms that respond to environmental transformations” (*Why Fairy Tales Stick* 22).

Therefore, instead of censoring and suppressing those topics and thoughts considered as not politically corrected by the sanctimonious minds of our societies, it is far more productive to reexamine, and rewrite, these yarns from our ~~own~~ system of values, placing them face to face with those dominant ideologies that have helped to shape them. Different peoples and cultures,



successive generations throughout the historical development of this traditional narrative, have retold these tales according to the dominant ideological tenets of the ruling elite. It is revealing that fairy tales were, accordingly, used to socialize children into the social norms and values of the prevailing codes of conduct. Therefore, we can find different versions of the same story because they do not remain static and unchanged. Quite the opposite, they are dynamic and ever-evolving accounts. We also have to keep in mind that the folk tale is, as it were, a traveller genre. These stories “slipped across frontiers of culture and language as freely as birds in the air as soon as they first began appearing; fairy tales migrate on soft feet, for borders are invisible to them, no matter how ferociously they are policed by cultural purists” (Warner, *Once upon a Time* xv).

The average reader is susceptible to take for granted that fairy tales are nothing more than a bunch of ‘old wives’ tales’ passed down through generations, for the sole purpose of providing merriment and amusement to the little ones at home. Indeed, for most of their history—particularly since the consolidation of the genre during Victorian and Edwardian periods, and until quite recently, they were regarded as children’s literature. That is a widely assumed misconception about fairy tales, but nothing could be further from reality. Zipes explains that,

[f]rom the very beginning, thousands of years ago, when tales were told to create communal bonds in face of the inexplicable forces of nature, to the present, when fairy tales are written and told to provide hope in a world seemingly on the brink of catastrophe, mature men and women have been the creators and cultivators of the fairy tale tradition. When introduced to fairy tales, children welcome them mainly because they nurture their great desire for change and independence. On the whole, the literary fairy tale has become an established genre within a process of Western civilization that cuts across all ages. Even though numerous critics and shamans have mystified and misinterpreted the fairy tale because of their spiritual quest for universal archetypes or their need to save the world through therapy, both the oral and the literary forms of the fairy tale are grounded in history: they emanate from specific struggles to humanize bestial and barbaric forces, which have terrorized our minds and communities in concrete ways, threatening to destroy free will and human compassion. The fairy tale sets out to conquer this concrete terror through metaphors. (*Spells of Enchantment* 1)

For his part, in *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), Bruno Bettelheim examined fairy tales following Freudian psychology. When it comes to the problems associated with growing up, the child has to learn to come to terms with the changing world around them: physical, psychological and emotional. Therefore,

[i]n order to master the psychological problems of growing up—overcoming narcissistic disappointments, oedipal dilemmas, sibling rivalries; becoming able to relinquish childhood dependencies; gaining a feeling of selfhood and of self-worth, and a sense of moral obligation—a child needs to understand what is going on within his conscious self so that he can also cope with that which goes on in his unconscious. He can achieve this understanding, and with it the ability to cope, not through rational comprehension of the nature and content of his unconscious, but by becoming familiar with it through spinning out daydreams—ruminating, rearranging, and fantasizing about suitable story elements in response to unconscious pressures. By doing this, the child fits unconscious content into conscious fantasies, which then enable him to deal with that content. (6-7)

It is in this regard that the fairy tale plays an important role since kids start listening, from their early age, fictional accounts that deal with issues related to their concerns, and the way to manage them. As fairy tale portray processes of development and growth, by identifying themselves with the heroes of these tales, children learn that it is possible to overcome any obstacle, no matter how insurmountable it may seem. Throughout the story, a sort of bildungsroman—an emotional journey fraught with serious dangers and dreadful ordeals, the hero's courage, resourcefulness and insight will be tested, undergoing, in the course of the events, a substantial transformation. Thus, young readers may be able to cope with stressful and awkward situations of real life—by living vicariously through the personal predicaments the characters find themselves in. They learn that in the fairy tale everything can be enclosed within the world of the possibility—dragons, witches and evil queens can be destroyed, and the heroes achieve their purposes; then, in dealing with reality, they can be reassured that evilness will not succeed, and that they will be able to prevail in the face of adversity.

Besides, due to the presence of magic and supernatural signs and wonders, children may feel that they are out of reach of any peril once they have departed the realm of fantasy. Nonetheless, as kids are growing up, they

start to realize that most of the messages conveyed by fairy tales are rather unrealistic. In real life, social mobility is not as easy as it might seem at first sight, and success is rarely a reward for good behaviour. In spite of this, fairy tale's message still lingers on the adult's mind, and we can see instances of such a thing in many everyday life: girls expecting the arrival of their Prince Charming; people have always dreamt of living in their own fairy tale, or it is normally expected to have a happy ending in life; we worship beauties but label old women as witches and hags; Cinderella is still associated with undervalued sisters, and many ugly ducklings turn into beautiful swans; etc.

However, since the last quarter of the twentieth century, fairy tales have grown in stature and there have emerged new ways of approaching them and literature in general, looking beyond literal words at symbolic and veiled meanings. For instance, “[l]iterary fantasies, expressing unconscious drives, are particularly open to psychoanalytic readings, and frequently show . . . a tension between the ‘laws of human society’ and the resistance of the unconscious mind to those laws” (Jackson 6). Hence, through the lens of the postmodern revisionist models, and the rewriting, and analysis, of narratives from contemporary literary theories—Gender Studies and Queer Theory, Postcolonial Criticism, Freudian and Lacanian Psychoanalysis, Deconstruction, and so on, there have been uncovered repressed selves, hidden significances, muzzled discourses and distorted views upon women's representations and feminine depictions, accomplished under the watchful eye of the sanctioned patriarchal rhetoric. According to Zipes, these stories “impose standards for sexual and social conduct that hinge on “inhibiting forms of socialization” (*Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion* 33). Furthermore, this critic deems that patriarchal concerns have been, during the course of history, reflected on tales that helped to reaffirm patterns of male domination and, as a result, female subjection.

Magic is a key element in most literature written for children, and it is especially significant in the fairytale accounts. These stories create highly symbolic universes within the realms of fantasy, and open up an endless world of possibilities for readers, who are likely to identify themselves with the heroes of the stories; at least this is true for male children. For females, it is a bit more

problematic since “the fairy tale’s magic has assumed the contradictory form of being both a spiritual enclave supported by old wives’ wisdom and an exquisitely glittery feminine kingdom” (Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales* 5). While boys have kept the lion’s share of fairy tales, namely the outstanding qualities of the archetypal hero (resourcefulness, courage, wits, integrity, confidence,...), women have generally been forced “to “kill” themselves . . . into art objects: slim, pale passive beings whose “charms” eerily recalled the snowy, porcelain immobility of the dead” (Gilbert and Gubar 25); or on the contrary, “a witch or monster, a magical creature of the lower world who is a kind of antithetical mirror image of an angel” (27-28)

However, today many authors, mostly women, have reappropriated fairy tales, recovering silenced voices, infusing new meanings to old stories, and producing innovative paradigms with spaces for participation and dialogue with the old ones. And these authors may have every right to do so because, within today’s framework of postmodernist thinking, a text belonging to the literary canon is considered no longer a sacred repository of undisputed knowledge but a piece of fabric—woven into the very warp and woof of multiple meanings, most of the time made up of other preceding writings to which they constantly resort to, and with which they intertwine in an ongoing dialogical relation. Thus, regarding the rewriting of fairy tales,

[they] can only be successful if they can copy themselves and are interpreted and revised successfully to address a society’s cultural needs and demands. Moreover, they will only be effective if they can mutate and blend in altered and adapted forms that respond to environmental transformations. (Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick* 22)

In the same vein, and regarding mythological tales, Margaret Atwood sustains that myths remain alive because they have been used repeatedly since ancient times. Generation after generation, they have been adapted to diverse circumstances and frame conditions, conveying different meanings (58). Besides, we also need to consider that the access of the last generations to the fairy tale and myth

has been heavily influenced by the Disney corporation and other similar conglomerates so that most people have preconceived notions of what a fairy tale is and should be. The media rely on our heavy exposure to conventional images to suggest in every manner and form that Disney-like utopias are ones which we should

all strive to construct in reality, and, if that were not enough, we even have concrete Disneylands as blueprints for our imagination to show that they can be constructed. (Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell* 117-118)

Undeniably, those Disney movies which are based on folk tales and mythological stories have established a predictable pattern in the plots and characters—later imitated by other film productions, and have conveyed “a conventional and stereotyped idea of the way gender is constructed.” (162) Therefore, it is invigorating to look at these stories—which are, in many instances, narratives laden with patriarchal undercurrents of sexual dominance and domestication of women—with fresh eyes. And by using the same dismantled elements, they can be reassembled in new and original shapes: “In recent years an ideology derived from legend and folktale, one that still has a powerful hold on popular belief, has been revised in several . . . most interesting and impressive texts.” (Hollindale 99). Hence, the rewriting of classical fairy tales has undertaken the task of offering a reversal of patriarchal postulates, particularly concerning women.

### **2.3. THE FAIRY TALE AS A POPULAR GENRE**

It is not easy to establish either the backgrounds, and origins, or the date of the folk tale. However, it is supposed to have been an important part of the cultural heritage of humanity since immemorial times, stretching far back into the roots of primitive social groupings, and the development of language. The fairy tale has been linked to orality from early times. One can imagine our primitive ancestors sitting around a crackling fire and trying to grasp the world and reality around them. These stories were made up within a particular social, political and cultural context, passed on from generation to generation, spread by word of mouth, told mainly by ‘old wives’—because oral folk tales were more than often told by women while they were spinning a yarn, driven by the pace of the rhythmical revolving of the distaff, and reshaped over and over every time they were reproduced. In fact, their basic outline is quite easy to memorize since one of the significant characteristic of the fairy tale is its shortness, being sometimes no longer than one page. In these stories, there exist similar, and familiar, patterns in plots, motifs and characters all over the world

that allow us to think about some kind of basic universal structure lying beneath the surface that—as Chomsky’s Universal Grammar suggests, may claim the existence of some innate structural rules in natural human languages, which are revealed in these simple literary manifestations.

According to Warner, “[s]cholars of fairy tales distinguish between genuine folk tales (*Märchen*) and literary or ‘arty’ fairy tales (*Kunstmärchen*); the first are customarily anonymous and undatable, the latter signed and dated, but . . . [their] transmission shows inextricable and fruitful entanglement” (Warner, *Once upon a Time* xvii). Besides, new stories have drawn from ancient sources in a process of reappropriation and recombination of plots, characters and motifs from older folk stories. For example, the mythological figures of Circe, Hecate or Medea were the classical precursors of the wicked witches of the fairy tales. But these stories, like so many other cultural discourses, were reappropriated by male writers, during seventeenth century onwards, and some of its key elements—namely their verbal expression and their constant rewording—started to be systematized and institutionalized in written texts and, subsequently, disseminated throughout society thanks to the invention of the printing press. However, in spite of their having been fixed in writing, they still kept some characteristic features associated with their folk nature. As Bacchilega points out, the fairy tale, “[as] a “borderline” or transitional genre . . . bears the traces of orality, folkloric tradition, and socio-cultural performance . . . And conversely, even when it claims to be folklore, the fairy tale is shaped by literary traditions with different social uses and users” (*Postmodern Fairy Tales* 3).

After going through the historical process of gradual institutionalization within the framework of literary academies and institutions, the ruling authorities artfully showed a marked preference for some stories which entered into the discursive practices of Western culture: “[h]istorically, the traffic of folk and fairy tales has been regulated by commerce, religion, and prejudice . . . result[ing] in e unequal flow of tales and an unequal valorization of different tellers’ located knowledges” (Bacchilega, “Narrative Cultures” 32). Further, they were central in the process of children and teenager’s socialization imbuing their conducts and thoughts with a system of values and beliefs

modelled within the parameters of the male-centred ideology given that “[t]he classical fairy tales tend to be overtly patriarchal and politically conservative in structure and theme and reflect the dominant interests of social groups that control cultural forces of production and reproduction” (Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick* 2). As a matter of fact, fairy tales are profoundly affected and shaped by the context and age they are written and published, reflecting socio-political realities of their time, and as such their ultimate significance is open to interpretation. Hence,

the revisions of oral folktales through the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries are fuelled by social and cultural references. Thus, hints at bourgeois mores and manners transfigure the discourse of the folktales in order to suit and to strengthen the rising power of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, such revised tales impose standards for sexual and social conduct that hinge on “inhibiting forms of socialization. (Talairach-Vielmas, “Beautiful Maidens, Hideous Suitors 272)

It is a scarcely known fact that women have performed a prominent role in the dissemination and transmission of the folk tradition—including traditional tales, as storytellers and singers. Some scholars agree that “in a predominantly oral society like the Greek and the Roman during the Republic, women story-tellers contributed a great deal to preserving and handing down the cultural tradition by word of mouth” (Nikolopoulos qtd. in Heath 69). Although it is not easy to ascertain the degree of influence exercised by these female narrators, there exists abundant evidence today that suggests that women in ancient times used to sing popular tunes and tell traditional tales while they were busy with some household tasks. In fact, a close connection has been proven between cloth-making and storytelling. According to Heath, two types of links can be

found between women’s mythic storytelling and wool-working. The first is the story that can be told in the cloth itself as women weave. The epic archetype for narrative wool-working is Helen in the *Iliad* . . . [Likewise, numerous] scholars have argued that the funeral cloth woven by Penelope for Laertes . . . must have been a story cloth . . . Women can literally spin a narrative, and it is worth noting at this point that the apparent subject of their weaving is often a traditional tale of personal significance.

But the more important association . . . is the one between spinning and oral storytelling, the very tales women tell—or songs that they sing—while they are doing their work . . . Women can literally spin a narrative. (71-73)

Therefore, from this we can reasonably infer that there has been a long-lasting symbolic bond between spinning and storytelling, which made its way into both literary language and common everyday expressions long time ago; for example, the English terms ‘textile’ and ‘text’ come from the Latin word *textere* which means ‘to weave’; as well, in ancient Greece and Rome, as we have seen, there existed a direct relationship between weaving and composing poetry; furthermore, there are still some familiar phrases such as ‘plot threads’, ‘spinning a yarn’ or ‘weaving tales’, to name just a few, which show very clearly that metaphorical association.

However, no matter how strong that connection may be, many classical writings that have come down to us reveal that these two occupations (spinning and poetry) were gendered activities. The overwhelming majority of narratives that have survived until today—and we may guess that the bulk of which were lost too—were written by males because that was primarily a work of men, and they had also seized the public space raising, thus, high visibility for their own concerns. Whereas, weaving was first and foremost a woman’s work, as substantial historical evidence (both documentary sources and archaeological findings) prove, and their voices as storytellers were more vulnerable and far more difficult to uncover, given their oral nature. Yet their stories were clearly existent although they remained muffled and deprived of access to the public stage, or else looked down on as ‘Old Wives’ Tales’. As a matter of fact, Heath (83) points out that it was Plato himself who first used that phrase, which had acquired a pejorative connotation by its being disdained as unrefined fictions. Actually, in Rome, mothers and nurses were “frequently cited—and criticized—for filling children’s heads with stories that seem to come straight out of Ovid’s mythological epic” (82).

As a result, it is by no means a far-fetched scenario to imagine that women fulfilled a pivotal role in the preservation and dissemination of popular stories. They spun their yarns—both literally and metaphorically—in their households, and in communal gatherings, thereby becoming the great repositories of traditional wisdom and folk tales. Later on, throughout the Middle Ages, “folk tales served *more* of an emancipatory function because they expressed the problems and desires of the underprivileged; in modern times, the



fairy tale has more often than not been “instrumentalized” to support bourgeois and/or conservative interests” (Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales* 7).

Strictly speaking, most scholars agree that modern Western fairy tales were written down and compiled “from the sixteenth century on with the rise of print culture and increasing literacy across the aristocracy; and later, in the eighteenth century, they were canonized by the newly-emergent middle-classes” (Smith, 425). 1697 was a pivotal year for the formation and development of the modern fairy tale, thanks to the creation of two seminal works by a pair of French authors: Charles Perrault’s *Histories el Contes du temps passé*<sup>5</sup> and Madame d'Aulnoy’s *Les Contes des Fées*.<sup>6</sup> They both somewhat laid the foundations of a genre which came to be developed, and very well established, during the two following centuries, due to the imaginative writings of some European writers who have become household names of folk literature, such as The Grimm Brothers (*Kinder-und Hausmärchen* (1812-1857))<sup>7</sup>, in Germany, and Hans Christian Andersen in nineteenth-century Denmark.

In England, unlike in Germany or France, fairy tales were not looked upon favourably, and by all means not particularly suitable for children, until the early nineteenth century, even though Perrault’s stories had been translated into English as early as 1729. For their part, the first English translations of The Brothers Grimm’s tales were published in 1812 and 1815 (156 stories), shortly after their original publication in German, and Andersen’s *Wonderful Stories for Children* did it in 1846. These last stories went into general circulation mainly because of their strong Christian overtones, and also due to their portrayal of poignant characters fated to fulfil an unhappy destiny (the Little Mermaid or the Little Match Girl) or else undergoing harrowing ordeals before their happily-ever-after ending (the Ugly Duckling or Thumbelina), which helped pave the way for widespread public approval of fairy tales as suitable reading materials aimed at children and young people.

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<sup>5</sup> *Tales of Olden Times*

<sup>6</sup> *Fairy Tales*

<sup>7</sup> *Children's and Household Tales*

At this point, it might be useful for us to pay a little attention to the classical writers who have gained worldwide fame as storytellers since the list is entirely male. As it has been indicated before, Charles Perrault may be considered as the forefather of the modern literary fairy tale. It is hardly surprising that, in spite of having been far outnumbered—and sometimes even preceded—by women writers of his time, he enjoys an unrivalled reputation whereas his female peers' names have largely been forgotten in a society which excluded women from the public spheres. However, “[f]airy tale offers a case where the very contempt for women opened up an opportunity for them to exercise their wit and communicate their ideas” (Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde* xxiii). Therefore, a name not so familiar among the general public, Marie-Catherine d’Aulnoy, was who, in fact, coined the term ‘fairy tale’ (*contes de fées*) in 1697, with her first collection of tales. The first translation into English of her work was published in 1707, but until 1750 the designation to that type of stories as fairy tales was not commonly used in England (Zipes “The Meaning of Fairy Tales” 222). These stories owe a great debt of gratitude to Greek and Roman myths and to women and their oral conveyance of folk tales.

As Zipes-details, during the period when the literary fairy tale developed and strengthened in Europe (1690-1710)—and it came to be seen as a genre per se, French literary works were populated with fairies. Nonetheless, no one described their own stories as fairy tales until Madame d’Aulnoy did so. In fact, “there is no other period in the Western literary history when so many fairies like powerful goddesses were the determining figures of most of the plots of tales written by women—and also by some men” (224). D’Aulnoy’s tales “mark what is lacking in the mundane world and depict how fairies must intervene to compensate for human foibles” (223). The genre was courtesan in its infancy, its accounts spreading within the salons of the French court of Louis XIV.

In several works and articles devoted to the history, evolution and meaning of fairy tales, Zipes highlights the relevance and importance of French female writers in the formation and development of fairy tales in the late 17th and early 18th century. For him, there is one major reason behind this fact. As

in any traditional societies, French women were largely confined to the private sphere, in which they had to be submissive and obedient to men, not only by law enforcement but also by cultural practices. Some of the few places in the public sphere where upper-class women had got access to were the private literary salons of the period; there, they could read their stories before publication, and shared common ground with other women. Fairies, who appeared profusely in their tales, hinted at a challenge to the adverse living conditions they had to endure, subjected to the will of male guardianship. Because women sometimes have found means to challenge male dominance within the narrow limits imposed by the patriarchal discourse.

Therefore, “[i]t was only in a fairy-tale realm. Not supervised by the Church or the dictates of King Louis XIV, that they could project alternatives that stemmed from their desires and needs” (224). Hence, fairy tales became the fertile soil to voice their deeper concerns about the asymmetrical relationships between men and women, and to question the position and role of women in a patriarchal society. Paradoxically, while female writers remained marginalized and subservient—pushed somewhat into the background, away from the public arena and the high spheres of power, their writings made their way through popular culture. Even if their form and content kept some semblance of normalcy and respect for traditional values and beliefs, in the warp and woof of the text underlay deep layers of meaning waiting to come alive. It is important to highlight that,

in the context of a pietistic *fin de siècle*, the fairy tale constituted a defense of fashionable secular society. Its portrayal of earthly luxury and happiness and its reliance on the supernatural powers of fairies, sorcerers, and other “pagan” figures obviously run counter to a Christian world view. And yet, as a narrative form associated with children and the lower classes and championed largely by women writers, this defense of secular culture appeared largely innocuous.” (Seifert and Stanton qtd. in Zipes, “The Meaning of Fairy Tales” 225-226)

For almost the entire eighteenth century—when the intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment ruled thought, there was no room for fantasy among all didacticism, empiricism and rationalism. It was not until the arrival of the Romanticism that a rekindled interest in fairy tales aroused. The Romantics relished in fairytale worlds that they found in popular ballads, local

legends and old nursery rhymes. It suffices to cite Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", or Shelley's "Queen Mab", among many other clear examples of the Romantic's fascination with folklore and the wondrous worlds. They strongly advocated for the fairy tales and sang the praises of fantasy as the most suitable form of writing for children, thus expressing their outright rejection to literature aimed at moral and ethical instruction. Therefore, the "oral roots of the folk and fairy tale made them a particularly useful model for a narrative voice, which spoke to a shared audience . . . the participatory nature of oral narrative served as a corrective to the authoritarian paternalism of instructional texts" (Cogan Thacker and Webb 7).

As said above, initially these stories were intended for an adult cultivated readership but, with the expansion of the children's book publishing, and the central position children acquired in Victorian society, many of these tales were altered to conform to the morals and ethical values acceptable to these younger audiences. From the moment fairy tales were considered suitable reading materials for kids and teenagers,

they very quickly became a means to question social, political, and cultural issues. Indeed, though mid-Victorian fairytales undoubtedly represented middle-class settings, protagonists, and codes of conduct, some of them also debunked the bourgeois ideology. Not all literary fairy tales were subversive, however, and many of them seemed to both affirm and denounce the fairy tale's patriarchal discourse, especially when written—or rewritten—by women. In fact, in order to challenge traditional roles, women had to work within cultural paradigms. . . . the significant aspect of most of them is the transformation and adaptation of the classical fairy tales to the social and cultural environment of mid-Victorian England. (Talairach-Vielmas, "Beautiful Maidens, Hideous Suitors" 273)

The English press was heavily involved in the general circulation of fairy tales during the Victorian era. But not only did it print the original texts, but also it "constantly rewrote fairy tales to tackle a wide range of controversies, whether to deal with industrialism, socialism, or race and gender issues. The fairy tale mostly became an experimental terrain in the second half of the nineteenth century" (Talairach-Vielmas, "The Victorian Press" 425-26). It was employed in many and varied ways during the nineteenth century and subsequent ones, and not all of them intended for children.

Already in our century, the expanding corpus of fairytale theoretical studies and literary works, growing up steadily since the 1960s, has been enriched by feminist criticism. But that's only half the reason since its increase has also been significant thanks to the myriad of inspiring retellings written with a gender focus and from a cultural perspective of women's experience. In doing so, the contemporary female author has embarked on a "quest for her own story . . . the woman's quest for self-definition" (Gilbert and Gubar 76). In both instances, either be critical approaches or fictional rewritings, they have sought to configure emancipatory spaces from where give visibility and voice to distorted and hidden discourses on the feminine in folk and fairy tales. These stories have effectively tried to challenge conventional and stereotyped assumptions about gender roles, in addition to cast doubt on the right of the patriarchal system to keep women away from the public spheres, confined to domesticity and forced to adopt identities that do not fit their real selves. As Warner points out,

The interconnections of storytelling with heterodox forms of knowledge, with illicit science and riddles—the juggling tricks of the Devil—emerge, only to be themselves domesticated, contained by the context of the children's nursery. Once this imagined voice was established as legitimate for certain purposes—the instruction of the young—writers co-opted it as their own, using it as a mask for their own thoughts . . . from the elite *salonnière* in the old regime to Angela Carter in our time. (Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde* xxiv)

Thus, the fairy tale has become a genre that within popular culture has attracted to the most erudite researchers because it is a fertile ground for challenging discourses and recovering of hidden meanings. Moreover, if women have traditionally played a secondary role in the cultural arena, fairy tales oozes female energy from the place of concealment that patriarchal discourses have thrown them out.

#### **2.4. FANTASY; A KEY ELEMENT OF FAIRYTALE NARRATIVES**

The role that fantasy has exerted in the literature intended for children is quite noticeable. One might think that it could be a convenient way to offer them means to deal with the hardships and struggles in their ordinary lives, and to negotiate the subsidiary position they used to occupy in the real world.

Rosemary Jackson argues that “[l]iterature of the fantastic has been claimed as ‘transcending’ reality, ‘escaping’ the human condition and constructing superior alternate, ‘secondary’ worlds . . . an art form providing vicarious gratification” (2), and children’s storylines not infrequently depict worlds of wonder and magic, offering enough detachment from the surrounding realities so that children can find a way to deal with serious concerns without experiencing fear or uncertainty, as has been observed above. And, all at once, authors may feel freer to tackle thorny issues otherwise difficult to address due to social and cultural constrictions. We must not forget that these fictional fancy worlds are mediated by a given context, certain circumstances and social practices, and all of them from diverse historical positions. As Jackson observes, “[f]antasy is not to do with inventing another non-human world: it is not transcendental. It has to do with inverting elements of this world, re-combining its constitutive features in new relations to produce something strange, unfamiliar, and *apparently* ‘new’, absolutely ‘other’ and different” (8), or as it has been stated in Gilbert and Gubar, “the poet, like a lesser God, has made or engendered an alternative, mirror-universe in which he actually seems to enclose or trap shadows of reality” (3). Likewise, Ann Swinfen sees an intimate link between fantasy and reality:

Fantasy is about reality – about the human condition . . . its major difference from the realist novel is that it takes account of areas of experience – imaginative, subconscious, visionary – which free the human spirit to range beyond the limits of empirical primary world reality . . . The fundamental purpose of serious fantasy is to comment upon the real world and to explore moral, philosophical and other dilemmas posed by it. (Qtd. in Pinset 64)

One of the central principles of Romantic aesthetic was its fascination with the notion of ‘the sublime’, a strong feeling of amazement experienced at the nature's grandeur; a state of the soul that transcends rational thought and words. Such an idea helped underpin the literary fairy tale because it was believed that fantasy was the most suitable way to successfully appeal to children’s response to the sublime. The ultimate motivation behind this viewpoint was the authors’ burning desire to apprehend the childlike wonder in this world, a way of recapturing the lost innocence. As Peter Hunt remarks, “the appreciation of fantasy does involve (for children as well as adults) the use of

and validation romantically constructed ‘child-like’ talents – the joy of invention and discovery, the wonder at variety and ingenuity – the fresh view of the different, the other” (4).

So, in a way, fantasy represents a return to the lost childhood with the dream worlds depicted in fairy tales which abound with enchantments and spells that echo in our ears, with marvels and prodigies that take our breath away, with magical creatures and imaginary landscapes which plunge us into a journey of infinite possibilities and opportunities; “all the wonders that create the atmosphere of fairy tale disrupt the apprehensible world in order to open spaces for dreaming alternatives” (Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde* xx). Hunt offers “one conventional explanation for the supposed preponderance of fantasy in children’s books” (6) which he thinks is in

that children are in some way closer to the unknown, the unseen, and the mystical. Children are equated with primitives, who have (it is assumed) a simple faith in animism and an inherent understanding of certain narrative patterns; or are equivalent to the ‘folk’ (a naive construction) who originated the folk tale, for whom the world outside the door of the hut was full of who knew what wonders and terrors. (6)

Such presentations of imaginary and magic worlds have been criticized from different spheres since the eighteenth century because they considered that fantasy is escapist and frivolous. (Hunt 7) However, several critics and writers have claimed “that this perennially popular genre is in some instances the best or indeed the only way to express truths and perceptions that lie beyond consensus ‘reality’” (Pinset 62). One of the firm advocates of fantasy as a suitable form of expression is Salman Rushdie who, in a British television programme asserted: “Fantasy is not escapism: it is a way of defining and dreaming the world” (qtd. in Pinset 62). In fact, the major criticism about fantasy comes from the mistaken idea that it is completely detached from reality and, consequently, raises false expectations in children regarding their station in life and about actual society concerns. So, both the child and the adult should keep away from it since its only purpose is to fill their heads with foolishness of make-believe worlds that have nothing to do with the real-world experience. Yet, the

assumption that fantasy is childish because you may not need to know much about this world in order to read about an invented one overlooks the obvious fact that

knowledge of this world is necessary to *invent* one. Fantasy is, because of its relationship to reality, very *knowing*: alternative worlds must *necessarily* be related to, and comment on, the real world. (Hunt 7)<sup>8</sup>

Fantasy has been a suitable means of challenging anxieties and of dealing with serious concerns of reality. At any time, “[b]oth traditionally and in contemporary times, harsh realities including violence, death and war have been mediated through fantasy as a means through which to discuss not only human conflicts, but cultural ideologies pertaining to growing up, maturation, and a sense of self” (McInally 42). Actually, fantasy stories have served for children and teenagers to understand these prickly issues without conflict, at least in appearance.

### 3. A CASE OF STUDY: *THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ*

*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is undeniably one of the most popular children’s book not only in the United States, but in the rest of the world in general since the early twentieth century. As Cashdan points out, [t]here is hardly a child who is not intimately acquainted with Dorothy and her adventures in the Land of Oz. Media gurus estimate that more than one billion people have either seen the screen version of *The Wizard of Oz* or read L. Frank Baum’s famous book, and the number continues to grow every day. (218) The novel was intended to be an American children’s tale in the fashion of the traditional European fairy tales. Actually, Baum acknowledged the influence of European fairytale writers—particularly Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm, for his own story albeit he wanted it to be less terrifying and gloomy, and a bit more enthralling and appealing for young readers (Osborne and McKeever). The book introduces a female protagonist who, in contrast with many of the female heroes in European fairy tales, has a certain degree of agency. Published in 1900, the book has exerted a major influence on American culture and society. In a nutshell, its plot summary has been well known to successive generations of readers and audiences, and it

follows the principle of *Alice in Wonderland*: a dreaming child finds herself transported to a fairyland, namely the supernatural kingdom of the wizard of Oz. On her way, Dorothy runs

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<sup>8</sup> All words have emphasis in original.



into strange creatures who agree to keep her company; she lives all sorts of adventures before coming back to the real world, brimming with memories and rich with experiences. (Nacache 453)

The story reflects, in part, the looking askance at the innovation and technological advances than the United States America was going through by a particular sector of the society, particularly within the rural world. Also, the magic land of Oz reproduces one of the distinctive traits of American ideology, namely its struggle for democracy since Oz is in the main a democratic land, at least in appearance. The setting was a typical American scenery remarking “upon social, political and economic policies of importance at the time. The story reflected influences of Baum’s strong religious faith, his affinity towards mythology and his opposition to the changes brought about by the industrial revolution” (Aigner 55). A vast part of the country was still anchored in the values of the past.

Therefore, in *The Wizard of Oz*, we can recognize some of the traditional discourses sustained by the patriarchal system, particularly that of the importance of enjoying the security of dwelling inside the boundaries of the familiar world—“There is no place like home” chants Dorothy throughout the story—confronted with the perils that lie in wait for the group of crippled who head to the Emerald City of Oz—the unknown, the other. This sharp contrast was traditionally employed as a way of teaching how important it is to live within the limits of the normative values—sanctioned by the authorities, who were always watchful of proper behaviour. We should keep in mind that, in male-dominated societies, the core idea underlying some tales focused on female characters—“that women are responsible for their own rape” (Zipes, *Why Fairy Tales Stick* 37)—is likely to be adjusted to the stark reality. It was commonly thought that sexual abuse was, and is, woman’s fault because they had strayed from the path of virtue. This is in part due to the fact that, when fairy tales were institutionalized, some stories

were transformed into gendered discourses about the mores, norms, and manners of men and women; the specific discourse embodied feminine and masculine dispositions within a larger patriarchal context that can be discerned in variations of themes about power relations and narrative strategies that inform the style of the tales. (158)

Although the book received positive reviews when it was published, yet later on, it drew adverse criticism for its mediocre prose. Accordingly, it took a long time until it became relevant as a subject of study by scholarly research (Osborne and

McKeever). In any case, we should bear in mind that fairytale writings, and folk literature in general, owe a great deal to orality, from whence they come, and they have tended to retain some structural features such as a simple and straightforward language—sparse in detailed descriptions and sophisticated lexicon—, the use of iconic symbols (colours, numbers, names, etc), formulaic expressions, or the employment of repetitive structures and mnemonic associations to aid memorization. These repeated passages or lines frequently enable the readers to actively engage in the story’s narrative world, and its value system. Hence, fairy tales—having inherited some of the traits from the above mentioned oral tradition—keep all their structures quite simple and fresh. Their lack of lengthy and detailed descriptions leaves fragments of the story open to the creative imagination of each reader, who becomes then an intrinsic part of the writing process.

The book was conceived as a unique piece of art with the closure of Dorothy’s adventures. When Baum wrote the story, he had no intention of writing a sequel. However, after the publication of the book, it became so successful that he received thousands of letters written by children encouraging him to continue with the story (Osborne and McKeever). Hence, the first follow-on was published in 1904, with the title of *The Marvelous Land of Oz*, and it was followed by other 12 novels, to comprise a total of 14 books, including the original text, with varying degrees of success. After his death in 1916, Ruth Plumly Thompson, American author of children's stories, was commissioned to write more sequels, and she wrote 21 novels, 19 for a continuous period of 19 years (1921-1938), and two more in 1972 and 1976. The original work included pictures drawn by the American illustrator W.W. Denslow. Baum wanted his novel to have illustrations which helped children to retain parts of the story and to make the book more engaging to them. Actually, “the original illustrator . . . could also have had an impact on the way the story has been interpreted. Baum and Denslow had a close working relationship and common goals in mind. They worked together to create a story that was the perfect combination of images and text” (Reads 5). And indeed it was a perfect combination with the writing because many of the pictures developed in the collective imagination and popular representations evolved around Denslow’s works since he “added characteristics to his drawings that Baum never described” (5), and however, they have been permeated into the collective consciousness.

### 3.1. L. FRANK BAUM'S *THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ*

Colour can be regarded as another character in the book. Green, yellow, white, blue,..., even grey, most of them primary and secondary colours, function as qualifying adjectives that are highly suggestive of the two worlds, Kansas and the Land of Oz—whose countries each has its different colour. Moreover, it can be opened to allegorical interpretations which enrich the narrative because although “[t]here is no great symbolic meaning to the color scheme of Oz . . . it is not arbitrary either” (Hearn qtd. in Nagle). According to J.E. Cirlot’s *Diccionario de Símbolos*, the symbolism of the colours is one of the most known all around the world and they have been consciously employed to convey meaning (135). Besides being used a colourful language—in both the literal and metaphorical senses—and displayed multicoloured illustrations, “[e]ach chapter in the original publication had a different colour page to represent what would happen in it” (Reads 5). This may be due to the fact that an element that is emphasized in most of the fairytale descriptions is the colour. By adding plain similes like ‘as red as blood’ or ‘as white as snow’, the depictions of landscapes or characters remain inherently basic and boost reader’s creativity; “[t]he colour flashes on the inward eye in all its familiar, potent brilliance. . . . Colours in fairytales are strong, simple, basic, and meaningful” (Langrish). Besides, they hold great symbolic significance, they “aren’t decoration, they aren’t even ‘just’ descriptive. They carry information. They are a form of emphasis. And they can be relied upon” (Langrish).

Colours are highly symbolic in most cultures and, in *The Wizard of Oz*, Baum “makes bold use of color and contains allusions to contemporary culture, allowing many divergent readings” (Koupal 77). In Western tradition, among other connotations, colours have helped to define gender categories, e.g. blue for boys and pink for girls. As Lizbeth Goodman indicates, “[i]n providing visual symbols for sex difference, we allow for imaginative and interpretative associations attached to those colours” (viii). In Baum’s tale, colours are also used as a powerful marker of difference between the worlds of reality and fantasy, between the widespread greyness of Kansas and the flamboyant and vibrant colours in the land of Oz. This becomes much more noticeable in the

1939 American film version, with its shift from black-and-white Kansas to Technicolor Oz. The Armenian-American movie director Rouben Mamoulian, who made the first full-length motion picture in Technicolor, *Becky Sharp* (1935), put it in plain words: “Humanity responds to colour through emotion”. (qtd. in Nacache 453). Hence, the lively and bright colouring of the film appeals powerfully to the audience’s deepest emotions, being used as a source of wonder and awe. In fact, the atmosphere of daydreaming and entertainment and, as it were, self-determination and freedom of the Land of Oz is conveyed by an extensive colour palette whereas the monochrome images—more greyish shades than black-and-white tones—of Kansas suggest an uneasy feeling of confinement and dependence.

In Chapter One of the book, “The Cyclone”, Kansas environment is described as having a “great grey prairie” (Baum 11), and “[e]ven the grass was not green” (11). Likewise, the house where Dorothy lives in is “dull and grey as everything else” (12). Concerning the other characters appearing in the chapter, Dorothy’s uncle and aunt, they are also depicted as lacking in colour; the harsh environment took “the red from her cheeks and lips, and they were grey also . . . and never smile now” (12). Uncle Henry is also portrayed in similar terms: “He was grey also, from his long beard to his rough boots, and he looked stern and solemn, and rarely spoke” (12). Everything therein oozes gloominess and misery. Consequently, the attentive reader may wonder, somewhat surprised, why Dorothy yearns for this place so dearly, with all the emotional intensity, during the course of the story if it is far from being the dream home that offers comfort and warmth.

In sharp contrast, the Land of Oz is depicted as a “country of marvellous beauty” (15), with

lovely patches of greensward all about. . . [and] stately trees bearing rich and luscious fruits. Banks of gorgeous flowers were on every hand, and birds with rare and brilliant plumage sang and fluttered in the trees and bushes. A little way off was a small brook, rushing and sparkling along between green banks, and murmuring in a voice very grateful to a little girl who had lived so long on the dry, grey prairies. (15)

Dorothy is amazed at the exuberance and prodigality of that unknown territory. No less weird are the first people (three men and a woman) that approach and congratulate her, who are “oddly dressed” (16). In this instance, colours are an

important marker of gender. Men are dressed in blue—like male babies in Western countries, wearing hats “with little bells around the brims that tinkled” (16), while the only woman is clad in white, with a gown “sprinkled [with] little stars that glistened in the sun like diamonds” (16). We soon learn that she is, in her own words, the Witch of the North, a good sorceress. Therefore, not surprisingly, her wearing a snowy dress connotes primarily purity, light and virtue. In Western cultures, it is also a powerful symbol at the wedding ceremony: it stands for the bride’s virginity.

In the studies of Social and Cultural Anthropology, the social relevance acquired by the outfit in the configuration of identities is studied in detail. It is what is termed as ‘social skin’; all the apparel and accessories used to decorate our natural skin, and what the others see from us in the social interaction. This social skin is closely related to the construction of social roles and identities. It is, thus, of particular importance that Dorothy is wearing a symbolic nuptial dress, in pure white, when she leaves the Emerald city, in her search to find the Wicked Witch of the West and put her to death. In reality, the girl is a bit shocked to discover a different colour in her frock because she has been thinking it was green, as everything in the capital city: “Dorothy still wore the pretty silk dress she had put on in the palace, but now, to her surprise, she found it was no longer green, but pure white” (84-85). Her white attire is highly significant because, as an agent of patriarchal forces—as we well see below in this dissertation, she is on the ‘right’ side of the path; accordingly, she wears a symbol of purity in her battle against evil, embodied by the witch who is dressed in black, the colour of debauchery and wickedness. As a matter of fact, Dorothy’s colour heralds her victory because that is the colour worn by the chosen ones in the Doomsday, when evilness will be won over forever: “Hallelujah! / For our Lord God Almighty reigns. / Let us rejoice and be glad / and give him glory! / For the wedding of the Lamb has come, / and his bride has made herself ready. / Fine linen, bright and clean, / was given her to wear” (KJ21 Bible, Rev. 19.6-8).

The Witch of the West has to be destroyed because she poses a threat to patriarchy. She is the embodiment of the matriarchal myth, the archetype of the unrestrained power of the earth goddess, Gaia, the Feminine Principle. In the

text, there is a central motif that signals such fact: the silver shoes. At the beginning of the story, we hear from one of the Munchkins that “[t]he Witch of the East was proud of those silver shoes . . . and there is some charm connected with them; but what it is we never knew” (Baum 19). Actually, the only parts of the body belonging to the smashed-by-the-hovering-house Wicked Witch of the East that are visible to us are her “two feet. . . .shod in silver shoes with pointed toes” (17). According to Cirlot (136), the silver symbolizes the mythical aspect of the moon, whereas the gold corresponds to the sun. It is significant to note that the moon has tended to be associated, for long, with some feminine characteristics such as receptiveness, emotion, fertility, intuition, nurturance or healing. On the contrary, the sun stands for all of the masculine attributes linked to patriarchal ideology. When this system was imposed over the ancient moon rituals, these were wiped out on account of irrational fear to women’s creative powers, which ended shrouded in mystery, as the Munchkin man states: “what it is we never knew” (Baum 17). Therefore, they are what Adrienne Rich named as a “woman in the shape of a monster” (qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 29), and they are also the “[e]mblems of filthy materiality . . . these women are accidents of nature, deformities meant to repel, but in their very freakishness they possess unhealthy energies, powerful and dangerous arts. Moreover . . . they incarnate male dread of women and, specifically, male scorn of female creativity” (Gilbert and Gubar 29).

Thus, the fact that Dorothy puts on the Wicked Witch of the East’s shoes before starting her journey is particularly relevant. They cast a protection spell on the girl and she turns out to be the personification of that feminine principle albeit a tamed one. From the very moment she decides to get back home, and takes the road to the Emerald City, she submits to the authority of patriarchy and its rules. This is epitomized by the yellow brick road that leads to the centre of the country, where the Wizard—who is the embodiment of the patriarchal power—rules. As mentioned above, the gold symbolizes the masculine principle, so the female power that Dorothy acquired through the silver shoes is controlled, and falls under the hegemonic discourses when she walks along it. She will only find non-normativeness by the roadside, with the three fellow travellers she meets, as we shall see later.

A colour that takes predominance over the rest is green. This colour is associated with both Oz and the Wicked Witch of the West. It is not surprising, since these are the two opposing forces that seek to prevail in the Land of Oz. However, the witch is an oddity because she is the incarnation of otherness—the unrestrained woman, who wants to prevail over the male principle. Although the centre of the land is green, where the Emerald City lies on, the witch is an outsider whose skin resembles that of the inhabitants. What is revealed later is that the green colour inside the Emerald City is mere appearance caused by the green spectacles that everybody has to wear in the entire urban stretch while the witch's skin is really green, with no need of artifice. No one can enter the city if the Guardian of the Gates does not put some green spectacles on them and lock them: “if you did not wear spectacles the brightness and glory of the Emerald City would blind you. Even those who live in the City must wear spectacles night and day. They are all locked on, for Oz so ordered it when the City was first built, and I have the only key that will unlock them” (Baum 70). So, where Oz lives, which is where the patriarchal power resides, there is no space for subversion because everybody is forced to accept the prevailing current of thought, equated to the tinged glasses Oz residents have to wear. The same happens with the hegemonic systems of thoughts and values which hold people hostage to their interests.

While the group is approaching the city “the green glow became brighter and brighter, and it seemed that at last they were nearing the end of their travels” (69). They are astounded by the beauty of the place and happy because they think they are going to attain their goals. But their hopes are just an illusion because the Wizard cannot help them. Initially, he commands them to defeat the green-skinned witch, but when they return to the palace victorious, the Wizard is not capable of fulfilling their expectations. As usual, he manages to trick them and it is inside them that they find the solution to their disabilities. Nevertheless, at this point in time, they have internalized the dominant mindset, and cannot perceive what underlies beneath that brilliance of the surface of Oz.

Patriarchal ideology has worked similarly than it has done in Oz insofar as it has created some discourses which have sought its legitimation in order to perpetuate itself, most of them concerning women's lives and gender roles, and

which have configured women's identities as subdued and submissive to men. To achieve such a goal, the biological differences between both sexes have become the first and foremost reason for inequality, constructing an asymmetrical and hierarchical society in which women have been relegated to a position of subservience. Besides, they have used different tools of subjugation and dominion over females. One of these has been the exercise of physical violence. However, there has been a more subtle type of violence as harmful. Or even more, because it has been harder to be perceived and more difficult to be eradicated, that is, 'symbolic violence', which are "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art...—that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (Galtung 291). But there are often some individuals, such as the witch, who do not surmise to the official line of thought. At the time Baum's book was published, the discourses about the 'New Woman' were coming on the scene and the patriarchal fastness, deeply rooted in people's consciousness, started to falter. The 'New Woman' challenged patriarchy by seeking new narratives, trying to find a new voice for the silenced women, and claiming to release themselves from the imposition of patriarchal stereotypes. For that reason, the Wicked Witch of the West's strength has to be put under control of Oz's forces, and the only way to silence her discourse is to destroy her.

Consequently, in order to return home, Dorothy has to confront the Wicked Witch of the West. The Wizard, who is "the voice of the looking glass, the patriarchal voice of judgement that rules . . . every woman's—self-evaluation" (Gilbert and Gubar 38), commands her to "[k]ill the Wicked Witch of the West" (Baum 77) if she wants him to help her to go back to Kansas. And she must obey because he stands as a surrogate for the parental figure of her absent father, so she feels compelled to be submissive to male authority. Once again, women are played off against one another by patriarchal forces, since "female bonding is extraordinarily difficult in patriarchy: women almost inevitably turn against women because the voice of the looking glass sets them against each other" (Gilbert and Gubar 38). Finally, Dorothy gives in to the wizard's urgent demand and—with the help of her friends, who are given the assignment to assist her in her mandatory duty—leaves the shelter of Oz in



order to face her fate: kill or die. One of the two females has to ‘melt away’, quite literally in the case of the witch. Accordingly, we are witnessing the same scenario unfolded in most fairy tales: the witch must die. It is noted how pervasive patriarchal tenets have been that most women themselves have internalized them in such a deep way that they have turned out to be necessary collaborators in the perpetuation of inequality. Hence, some of them have performed the function of surveillance over other women’s behaviour, which has to be in compliance with the established social norms. And Dorothy unknowingly becomes an agent of patriarchy.

Dorothy’s character may be seen as a coming-of-age archetype journeying through an imaginary land; her story is a sort of bildungsroman wherein the hero embarks on a quest for self-realization. In the book, we find a young girl—whose actual age is unknown to the reader—who, after having been carried away by a tornado to a foreign and unfamiliar territory, is ‘forced’ by a good witch to follow up a golden way in search of a mighty wizard, who will help her come back home. I have stressed the verb ‘force’ because she is subtly warned against leaving the road that leads to the Emerald City, where she will achieve a satisfactory solution to all her present predicaments. The Witch of the North tells her that she “cannot miss” (Baum 21) the road to Oz, “paved with yellow bricks” (21), which can imply—choosing one of the meanings of the word ‘miss’—that she cannot escape or avoid it. In fact, a bit later in the text, we see how deep Dorothy has internalized that advice of keeping on the right path to get to the Emerald City that, one of the times the group deviates from the pathway, she tells her companions: “We must get back to the road, in some way” (55).

This stay-on-track recommendation has been a constant in women’s lives, and fairy tales—as cultural artifacts loaded with ideology—are not strangers to these patriarchal discourses. We are all familiar with Little Red Riding Hood’s mother’s warning to avoid walking through the woods, where ferocious beasts and evil creatures dwell. This is a story laden with patriarchal undercurrents of sexual dominance and domestication of women. We can recognize in “Little Red Riding Hood” some of the discourses sustained by the Patriarchy, particularly that of the importance of enjoying the security of

staying inside the boundaries of the familiar world (the village, the mother's house) confronted with the perils of the forest (the unknown, the other), employed as a way of teaching how important it is to live within the limits of the normative values—sanctioned by the authorities—, who were always watchful of women's minds and bodies. Particularly, the tale is “a warning to little girls . . . [who] should not stray from the straight and narrow path of obedience (and chastity)” (Hollindale 98). Likewise, the yellow brick road that leads to Oz is the only proper way to reach Dorothy's wished destination and go back home. As Little Red Riding Hood, Dorothy has to continue along the path laid out “particularly one built on binary oppositions between masculine and feminine, active and passive, and heterosexual and homosexual” (Orme 87).

Indeed, dire perils lie in wait for the group whenever they stray off the path. Even so, sometimes one can face obstacles and setbacks on the trail: “After a few hours the road began to be rough, and the walking grew so difficult that the Scarecrow often stumbled over the yellow bricks, which were here very uneven. Sometimes, indeed, they were broken or missing altogether, leaving holes that Toto jumped across and Dorothy walked around” (Baum 29). The fact that the road is not even and straight stands, at one level, as a “metaphor for personal growth . . . [suggesting] that the path to self-realization is not only tortuous but filled with dangerous obstacles” (Cashdan 220-221). But at a deeper level, the golden road, which leads from the centre—where the Emerald City lies—to the margins of the magical country, is a mere appearance of safety. It is the means of control that the dominant ideology uses to prevent anyone from leaving the right path because it needs to exert control and instill fear of the unknown what surrounds. However, “[t]he journey to the Emerald City provides the members of Dorothy's entourage with numerous opportunities to overcome their fears and shortcomings” (Cashdan 231). In spite of them, they prove themselves to possess the qualities and skills they think they lack.

In *The Wizard of Oz*, the heroes of the story do not meet the defining personal qualities that the archetypal hero should display: courage, confidence, strength, integrity, acuteness, individuality, acumen, etc. On the contrary, our group of heroes is made up of a powerless little girl and three disabled males,

who undertake a hazardous journey in order to return to a certain sense of normalcy, since neither of them can be framed within what might be called normative individuals. Quite the opposite of these classical heroes—whose features have been traditionally considered male, these outsiders could be seen as the embodiment of Victorian middle-class females who were represented, among other traits, as frail, self-denying, patient, unassertive, and disempowered, as exemplified by the classic depiction of ‘The Angel in the House’. When Dorothy meets them, they lack of agency and autonomy, and they find themselves stranded on the side of the road, both literally and metaphorically. They are physically impaired, so they decide to take the road in pursuit of a cure for their maladies. Their paralyses are due to a pole which is sticking up his back (Baum 26) (the Scarecrow), rust (the Tin Woodman), and cowardice (the Cowardly Lion). However, we learn, in the course of the events, that their shortcomings are more psychological than physical because the three of them prove their worth thanks to their heroic deeds.

The major obstacle for them is that they do not comply with prevailing stereotypes of masculinity. They somehow display a sense of emasculation for their flaws that made them unfitted to satisfy gender expectations in order to be ‘real men’. We should not forget that patriarchal gender constructs not only have had a negative impact on women’s identities but also on masculine selves. The text provides an insightful example of this—if we are able to read between the lines for hidden meanings. When the Scarecrow is being built—equating this creation with the one accounted in the Book of Genesis, a pillar of patriarchal ideological tenets, his maker and a friend discuss whether or not he is a man:

‘My life has been so short that I really know nothing whatever. I was only made day before yesterday. What happened in the world before that time is all unknown to me. Luckily, when the farmer made my head, one of the first things he did was to paint my ears, so that I heard what was going on. There was another Munchkin with him, and the first thing I heard was the farmer saying, “How do you like those ears?”

“They aren't straight,” answered the other.

“Never mind,” said the farmer. “They are ears just the same,” which was true enough.

“Now I'll make the eyes,” said the farmer. So he painted my right eye, and as soon as it was finished I found myself looking at him and everything around me with a great deal of curiosity, for this was my first glimpse to the world.

. . .

Then he made my nose and my mouth; but I did not speak, because at that time I didn't know what a mouth was for. . . . I felt very proud, for I thought I was just as good a man as anyone.

“This fellow will scare the crows fast enough,” said the farmer. “He looks just like a man.”

“Why, he is a man,” said the other, and I quite agreed with him. (30-31)

And indeed he was a man and so were the other two characters that accompany Dorothy on her journey, even though they were placed at the fringes of normativity. However, all of the obstacles that they have to overcome serve “to strengthen their resolve, illuminating their inherent capabilities” (Cashdan 231).

Dorothy's first encounter is with the Scarecrow, who complains that he lacks intelligence: “I do not want people to call me a fool, and if my head stays stuffed with straw instead of with brains, as yours is, how am I ever to know anything?” (Baum 27) Next, she meets the Tin Woodman, a mutilated individual without a heart of flesh, whose maimed body has been replaced with metallic limbs: “during the year I stood there I had time to think that the greatest loss I had known was the loss of my heart. While I was in love I was the happiest man on earth; but no one can love who has not a heart, and so I am resolved to ask Oz to give me one” (39). And the last creature she runs into is a Cowardly Lion: “I suppose I was born that way. All the other animals in the forest naturally expect me to be brave, for the Lion is everywhere thought to be the King of Beasts. I learnt that if I roared very loudly every living thing was frightened and got out of my way” (43). The three weaknesses identified in them are associated with three of the main traits exhibited by the hero: wisdom and intelligence (brain), sensitivity and empathy (heart), bravery and courage (guts). These deficiencies put them close to the stereotyped image of women, in a submissive position.

Moreover, many women in the nineteenth century were diagnosed with ‘female diseases’ which included hysteria, nervous disorders, anorexia or agoraphobia. According to Gilbert and Gubar, “[s]uch diseases are caused by

patriarchal socialization in several ways” (53-54). That was the legitimate reason that sought patriarchal forces to strip women of her rights, a public voice and personal autonomy; “and consequently a “cult of female invalidism’ developed in England and America” (54). Patriarchal discourses not only do affect female’s individuals but also males since “if women, subjected to a labour of socialization which tends to diminish and deny them, learn the negative virtues of self-denial, resignation and silence, men are also prisoners, and . . . victims, of the dominant representation” (Bourdieu 49).

If the three males fail to live up to the heroic ideal, Dorothy also does not meet the conditions required to become a conventional heroine. With regard to the female hero, her image has tended to experience a completely different representation from her male counterpart even though, within the modern-day audiovisual culture, she has been subjected to some transformations from the traditional model, largely because of some recent feminist discourses and the profound and far-reaching changes in the socio-cultural dynamics, and the structural relationships among genders in Western countries. However, we have to view these fresh and novel depictions of contemporary heroines with great caution in order to be able to discern if they really challenge and, what is more important, subvert the fabricated depiction that the hegemonic discourses have shaped around femininity or instead, and despite this seeming empowerment, “[t]ough-women characters . . . do not entirely escape traditional gender role expectations . . . ,[and t]he freedoms that these figures suggest frequently lie within a narrow set of prescribed social boundaries” (Inness 8).

The heroic ideal clearly “points to a tradition . . . as distinctively masculine. The notion of heroism as idealized, public, male action . . . posits a long process in which public and private spheres become increasingly separate” (Rose xi). For long, the public space was clearly male while females were largely confined within the limits of the domestic household. The widespread absence of women from mainstream discourses persistently led them to be silenced and excluded from the public arena, “locked in the private house” (Bourdieu 2), where they remained “domestic and domesticated” (19). Domesticity and maternity were portrayed as a satisfactory emotional fulfilment to them. As a result, “[w]omen—or cultural conceptions of the female— . . .

[were] excluded from the questing, striving, and conquering” (Rose xi). Moreover, when a woman played the role of hero, her heroic deeds tended to be less active and consequential than those performed by her male equal; besides, they were frequently related to self-denial and sacrifice. In many fairytales and mythological tales, women, particularly maids, were sacrificed to the monster for the greater good of the community. Fortunately, a new kind of female hero is beginning to emerge, though very slowly, in line with the changing roles of women in contemporary society. Today’s representations of the hero often focus on gender stereotypes, and are largely carried out through the visual media featuring the archetypical tough guy.

In traditional fairy tales, most female heroes have been portrayed as quite passive by nature and, in spite of being subjected to terrible ordeals before achieving their true happiness; their ultimate aspiration seems to be rescued by a knight in shiny armour. Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty or Snow White may be the most familiar illustrations of these, each of them attains their happily-ever-after ending by being rescued by a prince charming who professes them undying love. They perpetuate female stereotypes of passivity, dependence and self-sacrifice. Therefore,

women in the best-known tales were either beautiful, slumbering young girls or powerful, usually wicked and grotesque older women. Though there might be a muted tradition of tales in which women were admirable, active, clever, and self-assertive participants, the dominant tradition prescribed harmful roles for women that little girls could not help but imitate. (Zheng 9)

As a heroine, Dorothy’s power is transient and does not arise from her own persona. She is blessed with magical gifts, a kiss from the Good Witch of the North—“I will use all the magic arts I know of to keep you from harm” (Baum 20), she promises—and the silver shoes which “have some charm connected with them” (19). At the end of the story, she is helped by another sorceress, the Good Witch of the South, Glinda, to get back home. Therefore, much to her regret, she is a hero by accidentally killing not only the Wicked Witch of the East but also the Wicked West of the West. The former dies when Dorothy’s house squashes her and the latter when, by chance, she is thrown a bucket of water by Dorothy, and melts away. Both ‘weapons’ are highly symbolic of patriarchal authority: family and religion, two tools to exert control

over women; they are represented by home and water (of baptism), respectively. Both are powerful symbols of purity and sanctity against evil and wickedness. As though they were the two-faced image of the Roman God Janus, the wicked witch epitomizes the otherness—the distorted image of the mirror that reflects back the figure of the submissive and compliant woman, exemplified by innocent Dorothy. Both of them

represent the power of the female imagination. [But t]he wicked witches reject prescribed roles for women and are neither wives, mothers, nurturers, nor inspirers; nor do they become instruments in patriarchy's hands, as does their "sister," the Good Witch. Embodying what patriarchy and its angels in the house fear most—aggressive and powerful women—the wicked witches are detested: Everyone wants them dead. (Paige 151)

It is highly revealing how Dorothy's personal strengths come from her identification with her house. A recurring motif in many children's stories is that it "celebrates home and affirms belief in myth of home" (Wolf qtd. in Wilson and Short 130). In the first chapter of the book, she is amazed to hear people hailing her as a hero for having destroyed the Wicked Witch of the East. She has a different view of herself, though: "Dorothy listened to this speech with wonder. What could the little woman possibly mean by calling her a sorceress, and saying she had killed the Wicked Witch of the East? Dorothy was an innocent, harmless little girl . . . and she had never killed anything in all her life" (Baum 16). Then, the Witch of the North makes a simple comment that, at first glance, seems harmless, but which is actually loaded with ideological undertones: "'Your house did, anyway,' replied the little old woman, with a laugh, 'and that is the same thing. See!'" (17) It would not have any significance if it were not for two important facts. Firstly, language is neither innocent nor context-free, but quite the opposite; in addition to being a communication tool, it is an effective instrument to convey the dominant system of beliefs and values of a given culture. Language is a powerful instrument of control which has to be supervised from the official institutions since, according to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, "the structure of a language affects the perceptions of reality of its speakers and thus influences their thought patterns and worldviews" (American Heritage Dictionary). It has to be used to fit the new situation, to construct a different reality.

Secondly, in patriarchal society, women have been customarily associated with home and domesticity, being seen as the cornerstone of the family thanks to the institution of marriage, which traditionally fostered women's dependence on men. The Victorian image of 'the Angel in the House' became popular during the later nineteenth century and persisted well into the twentieth century. As Gilbert and Gubar quite rightly point out, patriarchal "sexual ideology of the era was in many ways particularly oppressive, confining women, as Virginia Woolf long ago noted, not just to corsets but to the 'Private House,' with all its deprivations and discontents" (xxx). In Chapter One, there appears a vivid portrait of the evils of these ideas on women's identities and selves, reflected on Dorothy's aunt:

When Aunt Em came there [Kansas] to live she was a young pretty wife. The sun and wind had changed her, too. They had taken the sparkle from her eyes and left them a sober grey; they had taken the red from her cheeks and lips, and they were grey also. She was thin and gaunt, and never smiled now . . . Dorothy's merry voice reached her ears; and she still looked at the little girl with wonder that she could find anything to laugh at." (Baum 12)

Hence, Aunt Em's physical appearance and gloomy mood become an epitome of the evils that patriarchy caused on nineteenth and early twentieth century women's lives. "[L]ocked in the private house..." (Bourdieu 2), the woman had to remain "domestic and domesticated" (19) in order to "legitimate domination of the male principle over the female [one]" (19).

With such a depiction, the reason why Dorothy is so eager to return home is barely understandable because she will very likely suffer the same fate as her aunt there. Similar opinion is precisely articulated by one of the main characters, on one of the occasions that Dorothy voices her deepest desire: "The Scarecrow listened carefully, and said, 'I cannot understand why you should wish to leave this beautiful country and go back to the dry, gray place you call Kansas'" (Baum 30). To these words, the girl bluntly replies to her friend, "[t]hat is because you have no brains . . . No matter how dreary and gray our homes are, we people of flesh and blood would rather live there than in any other country, be it ever so beautiful. There is no place like home" (30).

Her firm determination to get back home, no matter how much it costs, is a clear proof of how hard it is for women to get rid of internalized cultural



assumptions concerning female's place in society, which traditionally was located at home. In this way, almost without realizing it, she becomes champion of that traditional system of values which banishes women's from public arena. In fact, more often than not, women themselves have helped to legitimize and perpetuate the prevailing power structures, by aligning themselves with the patriarchal agenda. Linda Rohrer Paige emphatically stated that "Dorothy chooses poorly when she elects to return home; she succumbs to the patriarchal voices of her subconscious, and thereby represses her imagination and waster her powers. Before Dorothy, other females have traveled this path—they, too, have "danced" in the red shoes" (147).

In this regard, there is one simple gesture that Dorothy makes, just before beginning her journey, which is highly meaningful of this fact: "She closed the door, locked it, and put the key carefully in the pocket of her dress" (Baum 23). That was a familiar routine anchored in the collective subconscious, by force of habit, which is linked to what Bourdieu labelled as 'habitus',

the importance that he accords to this minutiae of daily life, showing that gender and class inequalities can be analysed and understood by considering the 'silent curriculum' of the everyday . . . Whereas patriarchy dismisses these 'most mundane details of everyday life' as banal, insignificant 'women's gossip', they in fact offer a specific form of social analysis leading to an understanding of the 'micro-politics of power' which allows complex and specific linkages to be made across age-old dualisms such as individual and social, and private and public spheres (Skeggs 1997: 167). It is through interpretation of seemingly banal actions and positioning in the everyday that it is possible to discern the overarching framework of structural organisation including the systematic inequalities it incorporates on a larger scale. (Hook, 2005)

Therefore, through such an 'insignificant' action, it may reasonably be inferred that patriarchal mindset has permeated every level of women's lives. On the one side, Dorothy is seeking to protect her home from unwelcome intruders, preserving its sanctity—home equated to family which, as a social institution, was considered the kernel of bourgeois society, her only upcoming sphere of influence as a woman-to-be. But on the other side, that gesture conceals a deeper meaning closely linked to Victorian morals and values concerning women's sexuality, with its noteworthy emphasis on the weight of family as the

safeguard against sexual debauchery, and defending woman's purity against unrestrained female sexuality.

And she does not just close the door; she locks it and put the key in her pocket. The key is at the same time a symbol of confinement and of freedom. It has the power to open and to close doors, not only real entrances but also metaphorical gates. As well, women have thought to have the key to their own sexuality to resist sexual advances by males. This fact is really important because women have been constantly blamed for rape. The female-victim's speech is put into question because it lacks legitimacy when brought face to face with male's discourse. She is caught in a vulnerable position, forced to prove her innocence unless she wants to be accused of complicity. Hence, by virtue of gendered stereotypes, women have generally had no choice but to suffer in silence or face social stigma. Therefore, when Dorothy locks the door, she is protecting her purity and virginity.

Also, the open doors symbolize open-mindedness and by locking them, Dorothy closes her mind to any further change. Again, we see that she has deeply internalized the tenets of the prevailing ideology. Throughout her journey, Dorothy bumps into some marginal male characters, metaphorically, because they do not fit into the traditional masculine stereotypes, and literally since they are physically impaired, paralyzed by the roadside. And although she joins forces with them because she experiences the same feeling of alterity that this fragmented characters—she is an alien in a faraway and strange place, once her companions have been restored to a normalized condition—always according to the dominant beliefs, she finds within herself enough strength to return home. She has aligned with Patriarchy, has destroyed the witch, and wishes to get back home to comply with her duty as a woman.

By defining a woman as “a witch or monster, a magical creature of the lower world who is a kind of antithetical mirror of an angel” (Gilbert and Gubar 27-28), patriarchal discourses have sought to undermine woman's self-determination and empowerment, placing her beyond the limits of normative behaviour and confined domesticity. She poses a threat to male dominance, and “she incarnates the otherness of the flesh . . . the monster-woman, threatening to replace her angelic sister, embodies intransigent female autonomy” (28). These

anxieties about unrestrained females have been translated into literary works by means of the negative portrayal of a woman

that embodies the sacrilegious fiendishness of what William Blake called “Female Will”. Thus, while male writers traditionally praise the simplicity of the dove, they invariably castigate the cunning of the serpent—at least when that cunning is exercised in her own behalf. Similarly, assertiveness, aggressiveness—all characteristics of a male life of “significant action”—are “monstrous” in women precisely because “unfeminine” and therefore unsuited to a gentle life of “contemplative purity”. (28)

Literature, as any other cultural artifact developed in a given society, has tended to maintain a normative feminine beauty ideal which is more clearly noticeable in fairy tales that have a stock of archetypal characters shaped around their physical appearance: ugliness versus beauty. In Western societies, as well as in some other cultures, flaws and physical deformities, for a long time, were concealed if not prosecuted. These malformed bodies were considered loathsome, and the repugnance they brought on common people led them to be hidden and cast away to the boundaries of society (literally or metaphorically), as pariahs. One of the most recognizable outlooks to us, related to corporal misshapeness, dates back to the Judaeo-Christian belief upon abnormalities, considered as conspicuous marks of sin and epitomised, in these days, by the lepers: “Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper and every one that hath an issue and whosoever is defiled by the dead” (KJ21 Bible, Num. 5.2). Thus, the exhibition of distorted beings can be considered a very complex phenomenon.

In spite of the concealment of the so-called ‘monster’ from the alleged ‘normal’ society, teratology has had a deep-rooted tradition in Western culture: Greek and Latin mythologies were peopled with fabulous and monstrous creatures. In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, there was a wide range of beings whose changing appearances shift from any element existing in the natural world—including the human being—into another different one. During the Middle Ages, all kind of fantastic creatures dwelled European popular bestiaries. These imaginary worlds dealt with almost any type of bodily malformation, and they were ascribed to certain moral behaviours, intellectual skills, personal attitudes, etc. The key outcome of these oddities was to acquaint people with the bizarre and the marvellous. Besides, this also allowed that some literary fictions played

even with the illusory prospect of changing categories, making the ‘normal’ people into the ‘monsters’ when they were transferred to these unearthly worlds (*Gulliver’s Travels*, *Alice in Wonderland*). These amazing monsters must have born a kind of resemblance to real deformities.

One type of these ‘abnormal’ creatures are woman grotesques, such as the witches that populate classical fairy tales, who are conceived in naïve binary constructions (young vs. old, good vs. evil, male vs. female, etc.) as well as in gendered discourses of the feminine. Their monstrosity, which stands for some level of deviant behaviour from the norm—cannibalistic appetites, self-indulgence, pretentiousness or gluttony, among other serious flaws—is noticeable to the naked eye. Customarily, “the experiences of being a woman in a patriarchal society . . . [have been] subjected to certain ways of seeing and being seen” (Neumeier 2), and their “presence has traditionally been viewed as the object of the male gaze” (Mallan 27). Therefore, negative roles are assigned primarily to older women who are normally no longer attractive to the masculine sex. These villainous characters have, generally, been depicted with physical deformities and age signs: warts, deep wrinkles, greenish skin, protruding aquiline noses, hunchback, bloodshot eyes, and the like.

By contrast, though, fairies are usually youngish women with fair complexions, pretty faces and long blonde manes, dressed in shiny clothes and exhibiting virtuous behaviour—like Glinda, the Good Witch of the South in Baum’s story, and if by any chance they are old, they are normally portrayed with a friendly nature of a motherly type—like the nameless Good Witch of the North in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. As we can see, these archetypal depictions are deeply rooted in cultural tradition, and they are inextricably linked to the binary polarities in the construction of female identities. If, as Hélène Cixous states, “all mystery emanates from women being beautiful, but passive, hence desirable” (qtd. in Zheng 4), the representation of the witch, as opposed to the patriarchal ideal of femininity, is the feared other, woman and no-woman all at once, colluding with the forces of darkness that seeks to undermine the established social order. The witch epitomizes the alterity for the traditional discourses.

Of course, the sorcerer does not fall into the categories previously mentioned, mainly Good vs. Evil, a labelling attached to his female counterparts; he is always virtuous, even if we eventually discover he is a con-man. We learn, through the mouth of several characters, that he is good and “he rules the Emerald City wisely and well” (Baum 70). Even the Good Witch of the North acknowledges that “[h]e is more powerful than all the rest of us together” (18-19). Everybody paints a flattering picture of the mighty wizard in spite of the aura of mystery surrounding him:

‘it is said that he never lets anyone come into his presence. I have been to the Emerald City many times, and it is a beautiful and wonderful place; but I have never been permitted to see the Great Oz, nor do I know of any living person who has seen him.’

‘Does he never go out?’ asked the Scarecrow.

‘Never. He sits day after day in the great Throne Room of his Palace, and even those who wait upon him do not see him face to face.

‘What is he like?’ asked the girl.

‘That is hard to tell,’ said the man thoughtfully. ‘You see, Oz is a Great Wizard, and can take on any form he wishes. So that some say he looks like a bird; and some say he looks like an elephant; and some say he looks like a cat. To others he appears as a beautiful fairy, or a brownie, or in any other form that pleases him. But who the real Oz is, when he is in his own form, no living person can tell.’ (67-68)

It seems that, because he is a man, no one questions the fact of his authority and strength, although, later on, it is fully exposed that his identity and magical powers are a total scam and that he is an impostor. This different appreciation based on gender stereotypes is largely due to the configuration of the social roles allocated to men and women which, for a long time, were rooted on the deep-seated assumption that men were humanly superior and, accordingly, their tasks and duties in society enjoyed far more prestige than women’s; on the whole, the former being in charge of production whereas the latter just devoted to reproduction.

So, despite being shrouded in secrecy, the figure of the wizard emerges as a lawful and legitimate ruler. “The Wizard of Oz represents the voice of patriarchy—the authority behind the curtain—hidden, but loudly demanding that women fulfill its prescriptions. Indeed, Dorothy (woman) must please this voice if she hopes to find her “reward” of home” (Paige 149). The first appearance of the Wizard behind the curtain is highly symbolic. He is the agent

of the patriarchal values and his gaze shows a moral superiority: he cannot be seen, as the rest of his subjects are utterly exposed to his close scrutiny and judgement. Hence, “masculinity is empowered through the act of looking, while femininity is disempowered by being reduced to passively being looked at” (Zheng 7). However, the power of the Wizard is based on illusion and deception. As Salman Rushdie points out “The power of men...is illusory; the power of women in real” (qtd. in Wolf 5). But, patriarchal ideology has actively sought to bury that fact, displacing women from any public sphere where they could be properly seen, heard of, and valued.

### **3.2. THE WIZARD OF OZ IN POPULAR CULTURE**

By the end of the twentieth and, especially, in the twenty-first century, visual arts have experienced a spectacular growth, and have increasingly become an accepted medium for the expression of artistic creativity. They have also appropriated preceding cultural workings to render them into innovative and imaginative creations. Therefore, while it is true that the book *The Wizard of Oz* turned out to be one of the most popular children’s stories, it is acknowledge that its big-screen adaptation became an even higher success than the novel. The film has entered the collective imaginary coming to be, on its own merits, a major cultural benchmark which has served as a source of inspiration for many and varied adaptations and appropriations within different artistic manifestations and social domains. In the cultural practices of adaptation and appropriation, the shared knowledge of a given community (either local and small or bigger and transnational), concerning its canonical stock of literary works, comes into play in order to engage in a fruitful dialogic interplay between hypotexts and their hypertexts. Particular types of fictional accounts, namely myths and fairy tales, are part of the collective imagination of the peoples, undergoing permanent reshaping in form and meaning across frontiers, societies and generations. In the particular case of *The Wizard of Oz*, this film version gained more fame and notoriety than the original itself, and has become an icon of popular culture.

It is worth pointing out that, during the Golden Age of classical Hollywood cinema (between the 1930s and the 1950s), “movie-going was

American's leading form of entertainment. 80-90 million Americans would go to the movies at least once a week in the 1940s" (Nacache 451). Therefore, any book brought to the big screen which won public recognition, and enjoyed remarkable popularity, could give a new lease of life either to the text or its author. In the case of Baum's *The Wizard of Oz*, its huge popularity was increased thanks to the 1939 musical fantasy film—there had already been an adaptation for the musical theatre as early as 1902, but without any success—, which has been widely regarded as one of the greatest movies of all time—It obtained six Oscar nominations, including in the Best Film category, although it only won two of them as Best Original Score and as Best Original Song, the well-known "Over the Rainbow". In the late 1930s, numerous musical adaptations from fairy tales which portrayed imaginary realms and dream worlds, as Baum's novel does, were produced in Hollywood. Indeed, it could be said that there might not have been a better way to adapt this fairy tale for the big screen than as a musical film. And this is so because

[o]f all the Hollywood genres, the musical provided the best opportunity for artifice and escape. The musical is the less realistic of the nonfantastic genres; it is strictly codified and therefore requires a large dose of suspension of disbelief. The spectator is catapulted, sometimes after only a brief prologue, into a whole new universe having almost nothing to do with the real world—a universe whose colours are both bright and light, where singing and dancing are the only way to communicate, where characters have no other interest than the quest for love and happiness, and where the boundaries between dream and reality constantly overlap, so that the spectator remains in a euphoric state. (Nacache 452)

If the book already showed a powerful explosion of colour, its film version emphasized this aspect with its luxuriant palette of colours resulting from the masterful use of Technicolor, primarily employed in historical period dramas, musicals and animated feature films. The bright and colourful costume and production designs of *Oz*—the yellow brick road, the Emerald City or the red slippers—had a clear purpose: to lead the viewer into a world of fantasy and magic in opposition to the bleak and gloomy depiction of reality. Although the movie was quite faithful in essence to the book, there were some changes that, even if they did not affect seriously the story, showed how important the filmmaker's gaze and cinematographic language are. They are intrinsically

linked to prevailing cultural attitudes and beliefs of a particular period of time. One of the most noticeable changes in the screen adaptation is that concerning the colour of Dorothy's slippers, and it is not a minor adjustment, as discussed below. In Baum's original text, the shoes are silver whereas, in the movie, they are ruby red sequined. According to Paige,

[m]ore than any other image associated with women in literature and film, the ruby slippers represent woman's "inheritance" from members of her own sex. Before leaving the Land of the Munchkins, Dorothy inherits the shoes, which previously belonged to the recently "deflated" Wicked Witch of the East. Though critics have abscribed differing, often paradoxical, values to both the slippers and Dorothy's quest, they commonly agree on one indisputable fact: the red shoes are exclusively woman's symbol. (147)

The same motif can also be found in another familiar tale, Hans Christian Andersen's *The Red Shoes*, and it is



Image 1: Dorothy's red slippers – *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1939)

a recurring item employed as a symbol from the nineteenth century onwards (147). In Gilbert and Gubar, it is mentioned a poem by Anne Sexton which implies that "the red shoes passed furtively down from woman to woman are the shoes of art"

and that "female art . . . has a

"hidden" but crucial tradition of uncontrollable madness" (56), at least for patriarchal discourses. The red is "the colour of sacrifices" (Clark 219) and also the colour of passion. So, wearing the red shoes "hints of rebellion . . . [and] simultaneously presents a visible reminder of the penalty for woman's insurrection" (Paige 147).

The red is a lively and seductive colour that also symbolizes the menses, women's station in life as



Image 2: Dorothy depicted as a child – *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900), Original illustration by W.W. Denslow



fertile wombs. In the book, there is no reference to Dorothy's age. However, the artwork that accompanied the original text, which was drawn by the American illustrator W.W. Denslow, depicted the figure of a very young girl, a completely different picture showed in the filmic version. In this one, she is portrayed as a post-pubescent young girl. Therefore, it is particularly relevant



Image 3: Dorothy depicted as an adolescent – *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1939)

the shift of colour from silver to red, symbolically marking the passage from childhood to adolescence. The red colour has also been associated with fire and unrestrained sexuality.

In former times, it wasn't used by women with high moral ground because of their sinful connotations, inherited from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, a colour worn by the whore of Babylon depicted in the Book of Revelation: "I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy . . . / And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication" (KJ21, Rev. 17, 3-4).

This ideological stance has been internalized in such a way that this colour has also been linked to female's sexuality. The ruby hue of the slippers reminds us of the negative image of marriage for most women in the patriarchal society, for a long time, since it meant they had to surrender to their husband's sexual requests as an unavoidable duty, suppressing their own impulses and emotions in order to fit within the rules of decency enacted for the control of women's bodies, and thereby also their souls. Likewise, in Cirlot's interpretation of symbols, the shoes stand for the lower natural things, in two directions. On the one hand, in the sense of humility—it suffices to recall when Jesus washes his disciples' feet on Holy Thursday, as a sign of humbleness—and, on the other side, they represent ignoble things. In this instance, they are associated with the feminine sexual organ. Therefore, the red shoes may

symbolise the menstrual blood that flows out of the vagina; and this combined with the fact that, in the movie, Dorothy is a girl of child-bearing age, highlights the importance of the role of motherhood and the family for women in patriarchal society.

The movie stresses deep-rooted stereotypes around femininity, at least more intensely than the book itself. For instance, every time Glinda—the Good Witch of the South—appears on the scene, she is wielding a magic wand, a phallic symbol of authority and control, just like the pen is equated to a metaphorical penis within the literary aesthetics—“the pen has been defined as not just accidentally but essentially a male “tool,” and therefore not only inappropriate but actually alien to women” (Finch qtd. in Gilbert and Gubar 8). That clearly means that Glinda’s powers are conferred on her by male consent. The stick empowers because it stands for the phallus, and patriarchal discourse is phallogocentric and phallogocentric. So, every time she waves her magic wand, she articulates the language of patriarchy, exposing the constructed nature of women’s subordinated position in patriarchal society. This allusion is clearly seen in Gregory Maguire’s novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (1995), a revisionist prequel to the classical story—which is a sharp critique of power. In Maguire’s text, Glinda, the Good Witch of the South in the books, works in alliance with the government forces, while Elphaba—the green-skinned Witch of the West—is a more likeable character that uses her magic powers to do good, as we shall see later. Therefore, Glinda acts as “an agent of patriarchy . . . us[ing] her magical powers subtly, guiding Dorothy in the direction of patriarchy—and, ultimately, toward home” (Paige 149).

If the magic wand is quite significant, the traditional broom that witches carry is no less meaningful. Unlike the book, there is one scene that does appear in the movie. When the foursome is commanded to kill the witch, “they are ordered to bring back the broomstick of the Witch of the West in order to have their wishes granted. This implies, of course, destroying the wicked witch. Thus, patriarchy pits woman against woman” (Paige 151). For Paganism and Wicca, the witches’ broom, also called the Besom, serves to “spiritually sweeping away negative energies. . . . The Besom is a tool used in magic and ritual. . . . promotes fertility of person or land. It is also protective and



Image 4: Glinda and Elpha fighting – *Wicked*, Broadway Production (2003)

cleansing” (Kiley). Therefore, it is the witch’s symbol of power. If the broom is a household tool that signals the subjection of women, and her identification with the home, there is a reversal of the meaning of domesticity when the witch uses it to fly away from those

duties, beyond the control of the male’s rule. So, that is why it is so significant that the Wizard asks for the witch’s broom: the recovery of that household utensil implies the total defeat of the enemy of patriarchal society. The image on the above, taken from the Broadway musical *Wicked*, shows how each witch fights using her characteristic ‘weapon’: the magic wand and the broom. The former wielded by Glinda, the ‘good witch’, who aligns herself with the economic, political and cultural patriarchal forces, and the latter brandished by Elphaba, the ‘wicked witch’, who is a radical individualist character that tries to prove the Wizard's corrupt rule.

In terms of representation and cultural appropriation within pop culture, we can see how the movie has become an icon for the LGBT community—even the phrase “friend of Dorothy” is considered a term for a gay man. According to Pugh,

[with] Judy Garland as the star, its exaggerated characters of good and evil, and its Technicolor wonderland of vibrant colors and outlandish costumes the film displays a queer sensibility that countless viewers adore. Today gay bars in New Orleans, Seattle, and Sweden bear the name Oz, and the iconic polychromatic flag of the gay community pays homage to the film’s theme song, “Over the Rainbow. References to the film appear in numerous other artifacts of gay culture.” (217)

One of the reasons provided by Benshoff and Griffin (2006) for such a thing is that multicoloured Oz is “a land where difference and deviation from the norm *are*<sup>9</sup> the norm” (qtd. in Pugh, 218). However, when the movie was released, no

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<sup>9</sup> Emphasis in original.

one could ever guess that, four decades later, the film would become visual reference for the gay movement. The same could be said of the theme song, “Over the Rainbow”, which would turn out to be their anthem of an entire social group held together on the basis of their sexual orientation. That queer appropriation of the movie relies on the engagement of the audience in an enriching play of intertextuality because of the variety of reinterpretations and perspectives that lay ahead. Besides,

[w]hile it is frequently politically strategic to assume an essentialist position and critically examine how ‘most people’/dominant culture might understand things, it is also politically important, if queer readings are to stand up as legitimate readings in their own right, to articulate how other people might understand things *without reference*<sup>10</sup> to these dominant cultural readings. (Doty qtd. in Orme 94)

At the beginning of the celebrated film, Dorothy Gale—starred by American 17-year-old actress Judy Garland (1922–1969)—sang the song “Over the Rainbow”, a touching ballad—composed by Harold Arlen, with lyrics by Yip Harburg—which won the Academy Award for Best Original Song in 1940. She crooned it before leaving gloomy black-and-white Kansas and arriving in Technicolor Oz. The lyrics voice Dorothy’s deepest wishes, and she wants to see them come true. She daydreams about a place beyond the harsh and unfriendly world around her: “Somewhere over the rainbow / Skies are blue / And the dreams that you dare to dream really do come true” (“Over the Rainbow”), a place “Where trouble melts like lemon drops / High above the chimney” (“Over the Rainbow”). Her words illustrate the inner conflicts and contradictions women had to undergo for the construction of their own identities since their true selves were forced to be concealed and replaced by the fabricated image the hegemonic discourses shaped around a sublimated femininity. Dorothy lives within the limits of a constraining conservative society that do not let her fly like the “happy little bluebirds” do. This is because, in a society as restrictive as the patriarchal is with a substantial section of its own population, it is no wonder that

any young girl, but especially a lively or imaginative one, is likely to experience her education in docility, submissiveness, self-lessness as in some sense sickening . . . each of the “subjects” in which a young girl is educated may be sickening in a specific

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<sup>10</sup> Emphasis in original.

way. Learning to become a beautiful object, the girl learns anxiety about—perhaps even loathing of—her own flesh. Peering obsessively into the real as well as metaphoric looking-glasses that surround her, she desires literally to “reduce” her own body.” (Gilbert and Gubar 54)

...or to fly away!

With her song, she exposes her maverick and rebellious attitude, and her deepest longings for independence and self-assertion: “If happy little bluebirds fly / Beyond the rainbow / Why, oh why can’t I?” (“Over the Rainbow”) However, throughout her adventure beyond the rainbow, she enjoys apparent freedom because, as we have seen above, on the one side, patriarchal forces guide her on the ‘right’ path and direction and, on the other side, she herself becomes an active collaborator in the perpetuation of that ideology, since she has internalized the pervasive tenets of patriarchy. Moreover, her journey around a made-up fantasy world is fleeting, and after the carnival-like challenge to the social order, she has to come back to her daily reality. This, as

the oddness of much children’s literature . . . appears congruent with theoretical conceptions of the carnivalesque, an overturning of social structures and decorum that stimulates momentary release from the status quo yet ultimately reinforces this status quo. Umberto Eco posits that the return to normalcy after a carnivalesque eruption tames it of any revolutionary potential: “comedy and carnival are not instances of real transgressions: on the contrary, they represent paramount examples of law reinforcement. (Pugh 219)

Her coming back home means the return to normal and how her attempts to gain overall control of her life are thwarted and her freedom aspirations end curtailed. Finally,

Dorothy faces the most critical decision of her life—to remain in the Land of Oz or to return home. Not only has she demonstrated that she already has what her companions lack—a heart, a brain, and courage—but she has also shown herself to be imaginative and powerful. Sadly, however, Dorothy has swallowed patriarchy’s prescription for woman. No longer does she dream of a life away from home. Though wearing the ruby slippers has been exhilarating and imaginatively intoxicating, it also has frightened her . . . Dorothy discards her ruby slippers and regret her insurrection, thus ending her rebellion. (Paige 151-152)

However, in the 1970s, for the gay community this song was an anthem that expressed the ideals of freedom and a reasonable hope to find a place, over the rainbow, where they could not be prosecuted on the grounds of their sexual

orientation. In 1978, the artist and activist Gilbert Baker was asked to design the first rainbow flag by the organisers of the Gay Pride parade in San Francisco, in order to visibilize gay people and exhibit a sense of pride for being as they were; as well as an unifying symbol for the collective. He looked for inspiration in *The Wizard of Oz* because, as Dorothy, he was also born in Kansas. (Balaguer) Since then, the song had become a visual reference to the movement. Baker, in an interview, replied to an oft-repeated question that if he was: “Honey, I am Dorothy” (Rothaus) and he admitted that the movie and the song “did influence him a bit when he sewed his fist pride flag.” (Rothaus) As explained in an article by Kelly Grovier,

Baker was aware that any design he produced would compete in popular imagination with a painful, if resilient, logo by which the gay community had long been identified. In Nazi concentration camps, men imprisoned because of their homosexuality were marked out by a pink triangle affixed to their clothing. In the decades following the end of World War Two, gay communities around the world stripped the pink badge of its intended humiliation and defiantly re-inflected it with pride. But however heroic that reclamation of meaning may have been, in Baker’s mind the symbol was still haunted by the ghosts of Hitler and the Holocaust. The gay community, he believed, deserved a fabulous emblem entirely of its own fashioning. “We needed something beautiful,” Baker concluded, “something from us.”

And that was indeed the case. His design has been turned into a universal symbol of pride and reassertion of their sexual identity.

Another cultural appropriation which indicates the huge impact that Baum’s work has exerted in popular culture is Gregory Maguire’s novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (1995), the revisionist spin-off from the classical story that was the basis for the smash-hit musical which in 2005 was nominated to 10 Tony Awards. The book “is both a prequel and a sequel to *The Wizard of Oz* that recounts how a precocious, green-skinned girl became the Wicked Witch of the West” (Wolf 2). The story gives voice to the Wicked Witch of the West that appears in Baum’s book although she replicates the essential physical features of the movie character, interpreted by the actress Margaret Hamilton. Therefore, the audience is engaged in an enriching play of intertextual references because of the variety of reinterpretations and perspectives offered in the new material. In this regard,

Bacchilega draws attention to “several problems related to how fairy tale materials are selected, appropriated, and transformed” (*Postmodern Fairy Tales* 4). She wonders about the portrayal of women and the development of plotlines in these revisions, the narrative devices used to reinforce these representations, and the sociocultural ideological tenets which lie beneath these depictions. In the case of Maguire’s work, it seeks to challenge patriarchal discourse on women.

This time unlike *The Wizard of Oz*, we learn about the Wicked Witch’s background and life development, and the reasons behind her allegedly ‘evilness’ since the story explores the nature of good and evil, although the author never tells us how she becomes wicked. Elphaba is the illegitimate daughter of the Wizard of Oz who drugged and raped her mother—hence the colour of her skin which is the predominant colour in the Emerald City. So, she is the offspring of a widespread mode of domination upon women: rape and sexual abuse, which are both part of the male’s unconscious mind through which an absolute control is exerted upon the female’s body and, by extension, on her whole self. As Virginia Woolf elucidates, “sexual abuse is a major obstacle to the development of the female subject, to the achievement of agency in discourse and society. Woolf makes clear that sexual abuse functions as part of a larger process of female socialization” (Swanson 285); and, I would add, also of male. Accordingly, women’s bodies have been the a suitable place for men to bear the imprint of patriarchal notions of femininity and patterns of power.

Consequently, rebellious bodies, those which are non-normative, need to be silenced or muffled, repressed or removed, expelled from the decision centres and turned into ‘ex-centric’ bodies, placed at the margins of society. And there is no better way to exercise power upon women than by making them docile bodies. Sometimes, such submission has been gain thanks to constant physical aggression. However, side by side, there has always been a more “gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through the purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition...recognition, or even feeling” (Bourdieu 1–2). This is a a kind of violence that stems from the very essence of the patriarchal discourse, which

operates in the minds and bodies of the social subjects in order to wield authority and perpetuate male domination upon women because “[s]ymbolic violence built into a culture does not kill or maim like direct violence built in into the structure. However, it is used to legitimize either or both” (Galtung 291).

Thus, we see the physical imprint of patriarchal evils on Elphaba’s skin. Also, some of the undercurrents which could be discovered under the original text are exposed in this work. Here, the reader is fully aware of the despotic government of the Wizard that she seeks to overturn although she will die trying...or almost because the book has not a clear closure and we may think, by the author’s last words: “‘And there the wicked old Witch stayed for a good long time.’ / ‘And did she ever come out?’ / ‘Not yet.’” (Maguire 473)

The Broadway musical *Wicked*, based on Gregory Maguire’s novel, also reads between the lines the original work, and finds similar sexual undertones that the ones uncovered by gay’s reappropriation, since it “presents the story of a queer romance between Elphaba and Glinda” (Wolf 5). In spite of the bitter hostility between the two kinds of witches in *The Wizard of Oz*, which is fervently fuelled by the hegemonic discourse, the gender system based on the binary construction of femininity is somehow destabilized by the alliance between both of them in for most of the story. Wolf carries out a thought-provoking analysis of the musical’s original poster. According to her account,



Image 5 – Official poster, *Wicked*, Broadway Production (2003)

one would need to read *Wicked* “against the grain” to enunciate a straight interpretation. Even the show’s logo consists of a drawing of the two witches; Glinda, in profile, white-skinned and wearing a white dress and hat, whispers conspiratorially, in a stereotypical pose for girlfriends, in Elphaba’s ear. The latter is dress in black, her skin bright green. Only Glinda’s eyes are visible; she covers her nose and mouth with her hands, while Elphaba’s mouth and nose are visible but the hat hides her eyes—as if both women are necessary to make a whole face. (5)



It employs some of the patriarchal conventions around women's representations in order to reverse them and build up new meanings through inversion. The male gaze has tended to break and fragment female's bodies into separate parts so as to turn them into fetish objects that can be controlled, possessed and devoured by men. Therefore, by using the same strategies, the artwork is calling to strengthen women's bondings and to construct a new empowered woman.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

If we had to give a simple definition of what fairy tales are, Warner's words would serve for this purpose well enough. In *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*, she asserts that "[t]he nature of the genre is promiscuous and omnivorous and anarchically heterogeneous, absorbing high and low elements, tragic and comic tones into its often simple, rondo-like structure of narrative. Motifs and plotlines are nomadic, travelling the world and the millennia" (xxi). Therefore, as it has been exposed in this work, the fairy tale is a traveller genre, fuelled by the imagination of peoples of all societies and times all around the world. There exists a whole buried world of significance underneath its basic structure and simple plots, as it has been attested by the analysis of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Even unintentionally and unconsciously sought by their authors, fairy tales ooze symbolic meaning for those who—with an open heart and mind, wish to reach beyond the literal wording of these narratives of wonder and magic.

Therefore, with this work, I have tried to expose how Western literature, as a practice embedded in the tissue of the patriarchal society, has echoed the hegemonic discourses and mirrored its pervasive thinking and worldview. By revealing their nature as cultural constructions, we can find other speeches, concealed inside the interstices and cracks left by the official narratives, which articulate the same stories from a very different point of view. And by doing so, we can learn to see the unseen, to hear the unheard, and to touch the untouched. In the case of the analysed work, it is particularly noteworthy to see how the reappropriations of the original have brought to the fore some of these buried questions, particularly those that deal with gender issues: the discrimination and subjugation of women due to patriarchal attitudes and oppressive and repressive power structures; the deprivation of women's agency and

voice by hegemonic discourses; the misrepresentation of the female identities through a stereotypical portrayal based on binary polarities, epitomized by the figure of the witch; the symbolic violence masked as socio-cultural practices so damaging to women's bodies and minds; the infighting among women—fostered by patriarchy in order to prevail over time, which has tended to dampen a genuine spirit of sisterhood and solidarity; or the suppressing of queer and non-normative masculinities by dominant heteronormativity, among others. Nevertheless, we can also find in these reworkings voices claiming for participation and empowerment.

Throughout this dissertation, firstly, it has been exposed the double nature of the fairy tale, as a key element for children's socialization, and as a way of pure entertainment. During the development of the genre, we have seen how important the role of women has been for the dissemination of oral tales, and in the construction of the fairy tales as literary writing. Likewise, women have been present in the underlying discourses of these accounts albeit hidden among the interstices of dominant discourses. They have strongly emerged once the material living conditions have changed, and women have started to occupy the public spaces—until recently, restricted to men. Finally, the study has examined a well-known fairy tale, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, which has become a point of reference for many generations. This work has established a dialogic play with its rewritings and reappropriations to prove how fluid culture is now, and how the formerly clear-cut division between high-brow and popular culture has been blurred. As the thesis has proved, through the study of gender in Baum's fairy tale, silenced voices are recovered, patriarchal authority is questioned by decentred discourses, and identities which were forged based on normative principles reclaim a public space within the social and cultural arena.

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